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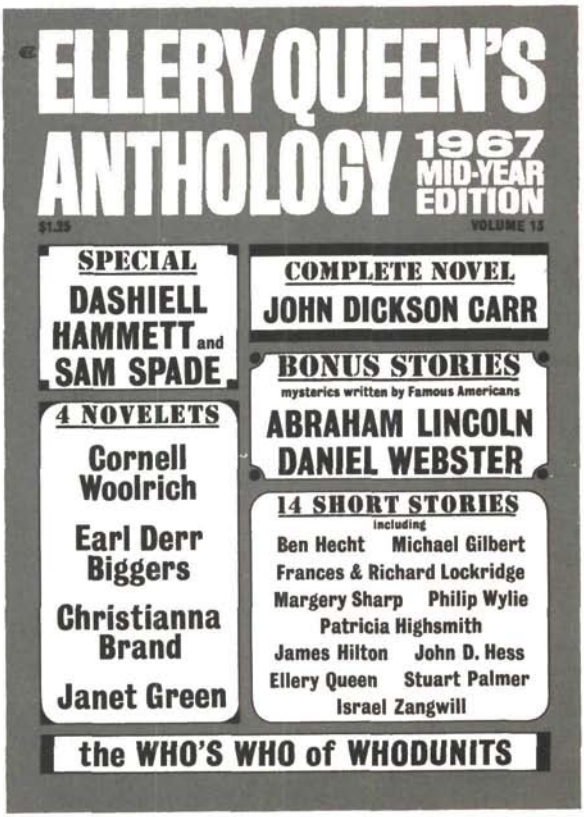

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HUGH PENTECOST

Here's an interesting and disturbing question: If you wore a mask all day—a mask covering your whole face—would you say the same things you'd normally say? But then some of us—or most of us?—wear a false face all the time. Does that mean we rarely say the things we want to say, or should say?

In a sense, every detective story wears a false face—at least, until the final page . . .

THE FALSE FACE MURDER

by HUGH PENTECOST

IT WAS ABOUT FOUR O'CLOCK IN the morning when Fred Towner called me. It was August, with daylight saving in effect, so that it was pitch-dark. It was the time of year for a full moon and bright stars, but it had rained that Saturday night and it was still heavily overcast.

"Paul Abbot here," I said into the bedside phone.

"Sorry to wake you, Paul. It's Fred."

"What the hell, boy," I said, looking at my wrist watch.

"Can you come over right away?" Fred asked. His voice sounded flat and expressionless. "There's been a—a thing."

"What do you mean a 'thing'?"

"A boy friend of Cynthia's has been shot," he said.

"God, Fred!" I said. "Badly hurt?"

"Dead," he said, in the same flat voice.

"Have you called the State Troopers?"

"No."

"Do it at once," I said.

"I want to talk to you first, Paul."

"Call the State Troopers right now," I said. "I'll be there in ten minutes." Then I realized I hadn't asked him the most important question. "Who did the shooting, Fred?"

He was silent for so long that I thought he had hung up; but there was no dial tone. "Things are a little confused," he said. "Please hurry, Paul."

Fred Towner is my closest friend. We grew up together, went

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to the same school, roomed together at Yale. We were on the same football squad, we courted the same girls. I went on to Harvard Law School and Fred went into the brokerage business on Wall Street. There was a stretch when we didn't see much of each other but we wound up back in the same country town where we'd started, I to practice law, and Fred, who'd made a killing in New York, to open his own brokerage office and live the life of a country squire. We played golf together, drank together, fished together.

There'd only been one touchy point in the history of our friendship. We'd both fallen in love with Marguerite Finley. This was for real, for serious, for ever—for both of us. It was Fred who finally walked down the aisle of the Episcopal Church with Maggie on his arm.

In the end I couldn't be anything but happy for both of them. It was an ideal marriage. They had only one child, Cynthia, and if there was any flaw in the situation it was that Cynthia would never have any brothers or sisters. I was Cynthia's godfather, and I watched her grow into a beautiful young woman and take off for four years at Smith. It was while she was at Northhampton in her junior year that Fred told me the terrible news about Maggie. She had perhaps six months to live, and she knew. She wanted it kept from Cynthia as long as possible; she wanted nothing to interfere with her daughter's education.

That Christmas Cynthia brought a young man home with her for the holidays and one look told us that Mr. Brooks Marshall had Cynthia wrapped around his little finger. He was an attractive, almost too brilliant young man. He had an encyclopedic kind of mind, could talk fascinatingly on any subject you wanted to name. He was a little too arrogant for my taste, but Fred laughed it off.

"A young man of twenty-two—going on fifty-two," he said. "He'll mellow."

Cynthia was so "gone" on him that she hardly noticed how tragically Maggie had faded. Maggie told her she'd had some sort of virus and would be fine in a few weeks. The truth was she'd be dead in a few weeks. Now and then I could see her turn away to hide a spasm of pain that twisted her face.

Fred wasn't as sure about Brooks Marshall as he pretended, but Cynthia was so happy he didn't want to change anything. And young Mr. Marshall had plans that would put off a sudden wedding. He'd signed up for two years in the Peace Corps and there'd be no wedding until he came back.

Maggie died that spring and Brooks Marshall went to Africa. Fred and Cynthia were left to comfort each other over the loss of Mag-

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gie. Brooks Marshall wrote Cynthia long and interesting letters, the non-private parts of which she read to Fred and me. He wrote several brilliant articles for the *University Quarterly*. Cynthia was properly proud of him.

But two years is a long time.

Fred was aware sooner than I, of course, that another young man had come into Cynthia's life. His name was Jack Haller. His father owned the leading newspaper in the county, and Jack was an attractive guy, headed for a secure future. He had none of Brooks Marshall's intellectual glitter. I know Fred liked him and felt more comfortable with him than he had with Marshall. Jack was a good golfer, liked to fish, was a rabid sports fan, and had been a top athlete in college. There was nothing of Marshall's preciousness about him. He was very male, but also gentle, easy-going, and with a genuine feeling for people in trouble. He would make some gal a very solid husband and I secretly wished it might be Cynthia. I could see she was having a personal difficulty—torn between these two boys who were so different from each other . . .

The wrought-iron lamps that flanked the front door of Fred Towner's big Colonial house were burning as I turned in the driveway. He must have been just inside the door because he stepped out onto the flagstone steps as I pulled up. He was wearing flannel slacks, a tweed jacket, and a navy-blue sports shirt open at the throat. His face looked gray in spite of its heavy tan.

"Thanks for coming," he said, as I joined him.

"Don't be an idiot," I said. "You call the State Troopers?"

"Not yet."

"Fred, the longer you put it off —"

"I've got to talk to you first," he said doggedly.

"Who is it?" I asked him. "Who was killed?"

He moistened his lips. "Brooks Marshall," he said.

"Where is he?"

"In the garden—at the back of the house."

"Where's Cynthia?"

"Asleep," he said.

"Asleep!"

"She's going to need all the rest she can get," he said.

"But—asleep!"

"You'd better have a look," he said.

We went into the house and through the wide entrance hall to the sun porch at the rear. Fred picked up a flashlight on the way and we went down into the garden. I could see the body just ahead of us sprawled on its back beside the marble bird bath. Fred focused the flash down on it. There was a jagged, blood-soaked tear in the raincoat Marshall was wearing, directly over the heart.

The bizarre thing was that Mar-

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shall was wearing a rubber false face, a child's Halloween disguise that he'd pulled on over his head, with only slits for his eyes, nose, and mouth. It was supposed to look like some sort of wolfman out of a horror movie.

"He wore it all evening," Fred said, in that same flat voice. "Cocktails, dinner—and all evening."

"What the hell for?" I asked

"His kind of humor," Fred said. He shifted the beam of the flash a few feet away. It focused on the dull metal of a .45 automatic. "My gun," Fred said.

There was a gun case in Fred's den. This automatic had been there ever since Fred had come back from the war in 1946. Guns were a hobby of Fred's and everything in that gun case was always kept clean and in perfect working order.

"We call the cops now," I said.

"I tell you, I've got to talk to you first, Paul!"

"It'll take them ten minutes to get here from the Barracks," I said. "That's how long you've got to talk."

I was the one who called the Trooper Barracks and notified Sergeant Cassiday what was up. I made the call from Fred's den where he poured us a couple of slugs of bourbon. As I talked to Cassiday I could see the empty place in Fred's gun case where the .45 belonged.

Fred's behavior didn't make sense. He'd left that boy's body out there for God knows how long. He hadn't even covered it. He hadn't sent for anyone—either a doctor or a cop. And Cynthia was asleep! She had been engaged to the dead man—yet Fred hadn't awakened her to tell her the terrible news.

"When did it happen?" I asked Fred, trying to sound casual.

"Some time after one o'clock," Fred said, sipping his drink. His gray eyes looked haggard and were sunk deep in their sockets.

"Where were you when you heard the shot?" I asked him.

"I didn't hear it," he said.

I just stared at him.

"Benjy woke me," Fred said. Benjy was Fred's Boxer dog. "Raising hell to get out. I went downstairs and let him out the back way. I switched on the porch lights and—and then I saw Marshall lying there. I went out."

Marshall—Fred went on—was dead. Fred looked up at the windows of Cynthia's room. They were dark. He went back upstairs and to her room. She was sleeping deeply.

"She'd had a rough evening," he said. "She'd turned in about one and I'd urged her to take a sleeping pill. She did, I guess. She hadn't heard Benjy."

"What kind of rough evening?" I asked.

Fred cursed, slowly and grimly. A nerve twitched high up on his cheek. I was beginning to feel a cold weight in the center of my gut.

"He was due back the end of this

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month from Africa," Fred said. "But he hadn't told Cynthia the exact date. Then this morning—yesterday morning—he called her from New York to say he was back and on his way up here to see her. It made it tough for her."

"Why?" I asked. "Wasn't she glad?"

Fred shook his head. "She'd changed her mind about him."

"Jack Haller?"

"Thank God," Fred said. He drew a deep breath. "She's basically a very honest person, you know. She hadn't wanted to write Marshall a 'Dear John' letter. It had been her plan to meet him at the boat—or airport—whichever way he came back, then tell him face to face. He didn't give her a chance. She felt sorry for him. He'd come here, expecting to be reunited with the girl who loved him. It would have been easier in New York, where he wouldn't have to face me—or Jack.

"He got here in mid-afternoon. He was bubbling over with excitement. I guess she let him have both barrels before he even got his bag unpacked. You'd think he might have taken it like a man, said his goodbyes, and left. But not Brooks Marshall!

"'It's my homecoming,' he told her. 'I have a right to this week-end with you. I have a right to arrange my own funeral services. And I have a right to look at the guy who stabbed me in the back.'

"I should have picked him up by the scruff of the neck and thrown him out then and there," Fred said. "But Cynthia felt guilty. He did have a right to the week-end, she told me. He had the right to plead his case. After all, he'd come home expecting they'd be married almost at once.

"So she phoned Jack to come for dinner. Jack arrived about six thirty and Cynthia had a chance to tell him what it was all about. Jack thought it was crazy, but if she wanted Jack to stay he would. And then Marshall appeared for cocktails—wearing that false face.

"'I have the right to hide my emotions from you,' he told Jack. And then began a long evening of needling. I thought Jack was going to take him apart when he said he was wearing the mask to hide his horns—the cuckold's horns. I've got to hand it to Jack. He had better control over his temper than I did. I got up in the middle of dinner and left them. I couldn't stand it any more. Cynthia followed me out of the dining room.

"'Why don't you go over to the club and play a little bridge—and pour yourself a few,' she said. 'I got us into this and I can stand it.' She gave my arm a little squeeze. 'Jack's being wonderful, don't you think?'

"So I went to the club—and I got a little high. I came home about eleven. There were lights on everywhere, but no signs of life. I went up to my room and got in bed with

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a book. Then I heard them come in downstairs. I—well, I listened. I gathered Jack had gone home, and Marshall was in a high key of bitterness."

Fred shuddered, then went on. "Things came out, Paul. He was shouting at Cynthia, asking what Jack would do if he knew about the week-ends that he—Marshall—and Cynthia had spent together before he went abroad. He said he hadn't made up his mind whether or not to give Jack a blow-by-blow description the next day. It might depend, he said, on how generous she chose to be with him then and there.

"She said something low and angry and then I heard her running upstairs. Downstairs I heard the terrace door slam as Marshall left.

"I went out into the hall and Cynthia ran into my arms. 'I'm sorry you had to learn about it that way, father,' she said. She was crying.

" 'I'm sorry you ever laid eyes on him.' I told her. 'If you want me to—'

" 'No,' she said. 'It's my problem.'

"That's when I told her she ought to take a sleeping pill and get some rest. And then—much later, Benjy got me up and I found him—the body, I mean."

"There may be fingerprints on the gun," I said.

Fred shook his head slowly. "There won't be any," he said. "I wiped the gun clean."

"Fred!"

"I couldn't risk it. 'Her problem,' she'd said. I just couldn't take the chance." He straightened up. "You're my lawyer, Paul. What I tell you is in confidence. I warn you in advance that if they try to pin it on Cynthia I'll confess that it was I who shot him."

There was no chance to argue with him. The headlights of the State Trooper car raked across the study windows.

"You better get upstairs and wake Cynthia—and tell her what's happened," I said. "You don't want Cassiday getting at her before she's prepared."

Fred headed upstairs on the run.

I picked up the phone and called Jack Haller . . .

Sergeant Cassiday didn't come alone. There was a State Trooper named Ferrara and he'd stopped to pick up Leonard Martin, the local State's Attorney. Len Martin and I were old friends, and he also knew and liked Fred from 'way back. He'd watched Cynthia grow up in town. It was tough for him. It was tough for all of us.

"Why didn't Mr. Towner call me when it happened?" Cassiday asked me.

"Too shocked to think straight," I said. "First person he thought of was me, his closest friend."

"*And* his lawyer," Cassiday said, frowning.

We went out to look at the body. Daylight was coming fast. Brooks

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Marshall's body looked somehow starker and more grisly in that early gray light. I watched with a kind of fascination as Ferrara picked up the gun with a pencil through the trigger guard and wrapped it carefully in a handkerchief.

"Hardly ever anything very clear on a gun," Cassiday said, "but we can dream."

"Let's go inside and try to make some sense out of this," Len Martin said.

Making sense was going to be difficult. It was my job to do what I could to protect my friends, but how could I hope to keep Len off their backs? Brooks Marshall hadn't known anyone in our community except Fred and Cynthia and Jack Haller. He had no possible enemies here—except those three. The gun was Fred's, but it had been available to everyone in the house. I muttered something about the possibility of suicide as I walked up to the house with Martin.

"No visible powder burns around the wound or on the raincoat," he said. He gave me a sidewise glance. "Are you going to level with me on this, Paul?"

"Fred's my client," I reminded him.

"Why the false face?" Martin asked.

"The guy was some kind of nut," I said. "Perverted sense of humor."

"Engaged to Cynthia, wasn't he? I remember reading about it in the paper a couple of years back."

"*Was* engaged," I said.

"Broken off?"

"Last night," I said. I had to tell him that much.

"I thought I'd seen her around a lot with Jack Haller," Martin said.

"He's on his way here," I said. "I phoned him and asked him to come over."

As Martin and I went into the house we saw Fred and Cynthia come down the stairs from the second floor. Her eyes looked puffy, as if she'd been crying. But she held her head up and I had the feeling she wasn't short of courage.

We went into the living room and sat down, rather stiffly, waiting for Martin to begin. It wasn't easy for him, either. These people weren't exactly strangers.

"In the end I'm going to have to have a formal statement from you, Fred," he said.

"I know," Fred said, in that same flat voice.

"But maybe you can both start me off by telling me, informally, what went on here tonight."

They told him, between them, pretty much of the story—how Cynthia and Brooks Marshall had planned to marry when he got back from his two years in Africa; how Jack Haller had come along in the meantime and Cynthia had become slowly convinced she'd made a mistake and how Jack was the man for her; how she'd intended to face Marshall with it the minute he set foot in the country, and how he'd

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turned up unexpectedly; the strange dinner with Marshall wearing the false face, and needling and needling them; and how Jack Haller had finally gone home and Fred had taken off for the club.

"It was a pretty bad evening," Cynthia told Martin. "Brooks and I went for a ride in my car. He never took off that false face. He never stopped berating me. He never stopped telling me what a skunk Jack was. We—we got home a little before one." And here I knew she went sketchy on Martin. "We—we separated angrily out there in the hall. I went up to bed and he went slamming out into the garden. I—I was exhausted and afraid I wouldn't sleep. So I took a couple of pills and—and I must have slept through whatever happened after that."

"You didn't hear a shot?" Martin asked.

"No."

"You, Fred?"

"My room's on the other side of the house. I was sleeping on and off till the dog woke me."

"Servants?"

"Since Marguerite died I have a couple that come in by the day," Fred said. "The only people sleeping here were Cynthia and me."

"And Brooks Marshall."

"Yes, he was staying here."

Martin fiddled with a cigarette, got it going. "If Marshall had killed you, Cynthia, or Jack, or even Fred, it would make more sense than that one of you killed him."

"Of course none of us did kill him," Cynthia said.

Martin turned his head at the sound of a car coming up to the front door. I knew what he was thinking. The most likely explosion with murderous overtones would have been between Marshall and Jack Haller, who'd stolen Marshall's girl.

The new arrival was Jack. He's a dark, broad-shouldered boy with a warm, kind of homely face. He went quickly across the room to Cynthia, who'd risen to greet him. There was nothing self-conscious about the way he put his strong arms around her.

"You okay?" he asked gently.

"Thanks for coming," she said.

"Nightmare for you," he said, and turned to face Martin, his arms still around Cynthia. "It's ten to one the creep blew his own brains out, Mr. Martin. He was 'way off his trolley. Not that I blame him in a way. If I'd lost Cynthia maybe I wouldn't have been a little gentleman about it."

"When did you last see Marshall, Jack?" Martin asked.

"They told you about that crazy dinner with him wearing a false face?" Jack asked.

"He's still wearing it," Martin said.

Jack scowled. "My being here wasn't helping the situation," he said. "All he wanted was to lay onto us with whips. Cynthia asked me to go. We had a minute together while

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Marshall went off somewhere—I figured later it was to get the gun."

"The gun?"

"The .45 that Mr. Towner kept in his gun case. I kissed Cynthia good night and went out to my car. I was just getting into it when he came around the corner of the house, waving that .45."

"Marshall?"

"Who else?"

"What time was that, Jack?"

Jack looked at Cynthia, vaguely questioning. "Nine—maybe a little after," he said.

"About that," Cynthia said.

"I thought this lunatic was going to let me have it," Jack said. "Scared hell out of me for a minute. He came up to me, pointing the gun. I guess I was part frozen. Then he slapped the gun right in my hand, and I stood there, pointing it at him. And he was laughing a crazy kind of laugh.

" 'Scare you, dad?' he asked.

"Boy, I really wanted to take him apart then," Jack said. He drew a deep breath. "While I was figuring what to do Marshall stopped laughing. But the sarcastic tone was still in his voice when he spoke.

" 'If you were a gentleman of the old school,' he said, 'an officer and a gentleman, you'd take that gun away with you and you'd know what to do with it.' " Jack's laugh was mirthless. "How idiotic can you get? Well, I just looked at him for a minute, and then I tossed the gun over into the flowerbed, got in my car, and drove off. I could hear him laughing, and in my rear-view mirror I saw him go back into the house."

"Then if that gun holds any fingerprints they'll be yours," Martin said. "And that's the gun the murderer used."

"No, they won't," Jack said.

I saw Martin grow tense. "How's that?" he asked.

"Because I didn't go home," Jack said. "I'd gone about a hundred yards down the main highway when I stopped and did a little thinking. Marshall was an eccentric, a real kook. I knew that from Cynthia, and from what I'd seen and heard at dinner. But he *had* been dealt a crusher. If he was crazy enough to start waving a gun around he might be just crazy enough to use it. I began to worry about Cynthia. So I got out of my car and walked back to the house.

"Just as I got here, I saw Cynthia and Marshall getting into her car and leave. It all looked normal enough. I figured he might put on the dramatic act for me, but there'd have to be the time when he'd make a serious pitch for himself."

"That worry you?" Martin asked.

Jack looked at Cynthia and grinned. "No, it didn't," he said.

"So what then?" Martin asked.

"I thought about Mr. Towner's gun which I'd thrown in the flowerbed," Jack said. "I knew how particular he was about the way his

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gun collection was handled. So I went over and picked it up. I knew there wasn't anyone home, but I also knew they never locked up. So I took the gun into the den, cleaned it off carefully with a silicone cloth that Mr. Towner keeps there, and put it back in the case. There weren't any fingerprints on it then, and that's the last time I handled it."

"Then somebody else took the gun out of the case again later in the evening," Martin said. He looked thoughtfully from Cynthia to Fred —and back to Cynthia. "Where did you and Marshall go in your car, Cynthia?"

"We just drove around for a couple of hours," she said. "Brooks did most of the talking—all of it angry and bitter. A little after midnight we went into Joe's Place in the village for a hamburger and coffee."

"He was still wearing that false face?"

Cynthia nodded. "We sat in one of the corner booths. Not too many people noticed, and those that did thought it was some sort of funny gag. We didn't stay long. Brooks was yelling at me, accusing me. I got up and left even before we got our order."

Martin turned back to Jack. "So where were you from, say, midnight on, Jack?"

"At home."

"Who else was there?"

"No one. You probably know I just bought the house a couple of months ago. I hope Cynthia's going to share it with me soon." He smiled at her.

"Then you can't prove you didn't come back here again?"

Jack's face hardened. "No, I can't prove I didn't," he said. "Can you prove I did, Mr. Martin?"

So it was no longer going to be a friendly tea party.

"You said you and Marshall separated angrily out there in the hall when you got home," Martin said to Cynthia. "What was that specific quarrel about?"

I saw Fred give his daughter an imperceptible shake of his head. She wasn't to tell. But she stood very straight, looking directly at Martin.

"Brooks threatened to tell Jack that he and I had had an affair before he went to Africa. He said if I'd make love to him then—tonight —maybe he'd keep it to himself."

I saw Jack Haller reach out and put his hand on her shoulder, completely relaxed. "That shows the kind of punk he was," he said. "I neglected to mention that he'd already told me all about the affair when I was leaving—when we were playing Alphonse-and-Gaston with the gun."

Cynthia spun around to look at him. He smiled at her.

"That didn't matter to you?" Martin asked.

"What Cynthia did with her life before I knew her is none of my business," Jack said. He drew her

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close to him. "I was only sorry she'd been mixed up with such a jerk."

"You didn't boil over it and boil over it and finally come back around one o'clock, take the gun out of the case, and shoot him?" Martin demanded. He was now all prosecutor.

"I didn't."

"What about you, Cynthia? He threatened you. Weren't you afraid he might break up you and Jack? Did you get the gun from the case and follow him out into the garden?"

"No!" Her face was ivory-white. "But I didn't tell you the truth about one thing, Mr. Martin."

"I was beginning to be quite sure of that," Martin said, his voice harsh. "I was beginning to wonder if any of you has told me the truth. What did *you* lie about, Cynthia?"

"I did hear the shot," she said.

The room was suddenly still—deathly still.

"My room is on that side of the house," Cynthia said. She was clinging to Jack so hard I could see the knuckles on the back of her hands shine. "Much earlier—when Jack left after dinner—I was waiting inside. I didn't hear his car start, so I went to one of the front windows. I—I saw Jack standing there pointing a gun at Brooks. I—I was panic-stricken."

"That must have been the exact moment he slapped the gun into my hand," Jack said quietly.

"I—I ran to the front door," Cynthia said, "and just as I reached it Brooks came in, and I heard Jack's car going away. Brooks laughed at me when I asked him what on earth had been happening. 'I was trying to get your boy to act like a gentleman,' he said, 'but it isn't in him.' That's all he'd tell me. But—much later—when I heard the shot out in the garden—"

"You thought I'd come back?" Jack asked.

She nodded. "I—I put on a robe and ran down into the garden. He—he was dead. There wasn't a sight or sound of anyone else. But—"

"It wasn't me, darling. I swear it," Jack said.

"I'd seen you with the gun," Cynthia said. "I—I didn't know what to think. So—so I picked up the gun and wiped it clean on my robe. Then I heard Benjy barking inside the house. I went around to the back door and up the back stairs because I didn't want father to find me there."

"And so you weren't asleep. You just waited for someone to break the news to you—news you already knew," Martin said.

"Yes . . . yes."

Martin spun on Fred. "And did you find the body just after one o'clock and wait until four to call Paul?" he asked.

Fred shook his head. "I was asleep," he said slowly. I could almost hear the wheels turning in his head. He was going to protect Cyn-

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thia and Jack, no matter what. "But—but when I did go out I—I wiped off the gun too," Fred said.

"Thinking it might have been Cynthia? Knowing damn well it *must* have been Cynthia?" Martin shouted at him.

"No!"

"You're all in this up to your necks!" Martin said. "One of you did it and the rest of you are all deliberately confusing the issue. You'd better come clean, whichever one of you it is. There's just a chance that two of you might go free. But if you keep this up—"

"I think at this point I must advise my clients not to do any more talking," I said.

Sergeant Cassiday came in from the front hall, an odd expression on his face. "The ambulance is here to take away the deceased," he said. "It would save time if someone would make a formal identification."

"I'll do it," Fred said, in that flat, hopeless voice.

I went with him and Martin out into the hall. Jack and Cynthia trailed behind us. The body lay on a stretcher, covered by a sheet.

"We took the false face off," Cassiday said, as he bent down and pulled back the covering.

I heard my breath make a strangling sound in my throat. The face was turned away from us, but the hair was a faded blond color. I remembered Brooks Marshall as having brown hair. Cassiday was staring at me.

"So it isn't Marshall," he said.

"It's Brooks," Cynthia said, very quietly. "Two years of African sun bleached his hair out, but it's Brooks."

Martin turned to her. "And two years of two-timing him turned you pretty cold-blooded, didn't it, Cynthia? Marshall threatened you, and you had no way of knowing that Jack would take it as he has."

I heard Fred's breath let out in a long weary sigh. He took his tired eyes away from the body on the stretcher as Cassiday covered the dead face.

"There's no use going any further with this, Martin," Fred said. "I killed him."

"Don't be a damn fool, Fred," I said sharply.

He didn't look at me. He seemed to be focusing with all his might on Cynthia, as if, somehow, he hoped to force her to be still. "I heard the whole miserable business between Cynthia and Marshall when they came home. I—I couldn't let him live. I couldn't let him do to Cynthia what he threatened. I didn't know, of course, that he'd already told Jack. So I killed him, and I wiped off the gun, and I admit I hoped I'd get away with it."

The palms of my hands were wet. I looked at Cynthia's stunned, white face. Her world was crumbling. I couldn't let that happen.

"I think I'd better fill you in on some real facts, Martin," I said. "I was in Joe's Place when Cynthia and

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Marshall arrived there earlier tonight. I don't think they saw me, but I was in the next booth. I heard everything Marshall had to say—his threat to tell Jack the truth, his attempt to force Cynthia to buy his silence." I looked straight at Cynthia. "I couldn't let him do it to you, honey," I said. "The last time I saw your mother alone before she died I made her a promise. I promised to look out for you and Fred. I had to make damn sure that Marshall didn't destroy you both."

Martin moistened his lips. "Are you trying to say—?"

"I'm telling you that I killed Marshall," I said. "I followed him and Cynthia back here from Joe's Place. I intended to have it out with him. Then I heard Marshall make the same threats, the same demands—here in this hallway. Of course I didn't know Fred had heard him, too. I—I slipped in the side door and got Fred's gun out of the case in the den."

"You knew it was there?" Martin asked.

"I'm as familiar with this house as I am with my own," I said. "I found Marshall in the garden. I told him why I was going to kill him, and—and I killed him. I wiped the gun off with my handkerchief and threw the gun on the ground beside him. I had some kind of hope it might be written off as a suicide."

"Uncle Paul!" I heard Cynthia whisper.

I looked at Fred. "I couldn't let you take the rap for me, Fred," I said. "That would have made the whole thing pointless."

I felt Cassiday's strong fingers close on my arm.

"You must have been out of your mind!" Fred said.

I tried a grin that felt frozen. "I hope some smart lawyer can prove that in court," I said. "I wouldn't want that scummy Marshall to have the last word—he deserved what he got."

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THE TERROR RACKET

by The GORDONS

MOST DAYS ARE LOST SHORTLY after they are lived, but Rip was to remember this one with clarity. He was at his desk in the FBI's Chicago office, taking a confession in an interstate hijacking case, when the call was routed through to him at 4:12. He knew the exact time because he had to jot it down on the routine complaint form.

It was a girl's voice, warm and husky. "I've got to talk with you,"

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she said. "Could you come to my apartment tonight?"

He asked her name, and then thought for a long moment that the telephone had gone dead. "Hello," he said.

She was still at the other end. "You won't tell anyone I called? Not anyone?"

He repeated his little speech about the FBI holding all information in strict confidence, including her name.

"Brenda Ralles," she said. "I'm a secretary in a law office. I—"

She stopped as though someone had walked by. He could hear fuzzed-up words in the background.

"Your address?" he asked.

She gave him a number on Morse Avenue, then asked, "Did you say you were Mr. Ripley?"

"That's right. John Ripley. Would you tell me something about the information you have?"

"No, I couldn't. Not over the phone. I know this sounds—well, it's about the little Martel girl. If you could come about eleven—"

Her words drifted away. He sorted quickly through the file room of his mind for the name of Martel. Failing to find it, he signaled Peg. She was the receptionist, an ash-blonde of nineteen with an upturned nose and quiet, pixie ways. He handed her a slip with a name scribbled on it.

"Couldn't we make the appointment earlier, Miss Ralles?"

"I don't want anyone to know you'll come. It's an apartment house. Everybody will be asleep by then. I live on the first floor, at the back of the building. You can come in the alleyway—"

He listened intently, trying to evaluate her words, to determine whether he should make the appointment at all.

Peg placed a file folder before him. He lifted the jacket cover and glanced at the case. He said into the phone, "An agent will be at your apartment at eleven, Miss Ralles."

What he had read was: "TITLE: Katherine Martel, victim. CHARACTER OF CASE: Extortion."

The terror racket.

The facts were few. The extortionist had phoned Katherine Martel, a buyer for the Pierce-Cabot Department Store, to demand the $10,000 in insurance left by her husband, Bill, killed in Korea. The extortionist had threatened to harm her daughter, Vicki, aged six. Rip noted the case was being worked by Special Agent Zack Stewart.

Shortly after 5:30, Zack looked in. His very bigness carried assurance in a matter-of-fact way.

"What's with you?" he asked.

Rip stood up to unlimber his long lean frame. "The Martel case. Woman name of Brenda Ralles says she has information. Do you know her?"

Zack put his 230 pounds down carefully. "Could be a break," he said slowly. "I never heard of a

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Brenda Ralles. Nobody knows about the Martel matter except the extortionist, Kate Martel, and the FBI."

"Maybe she talked."

"Not Kate Martel."

"Eight days are a long time to wait," Rip said. "Mrs. Martel has done a lot of worrying. She's never gone to bed without expecting the phone to ring, or to the mailbox without thinking there might be a letter."

Rip had seen the insidious eating away of the insides of the strongest. It was something no one could fight: the unseen around you, waiting at night when you turned off the lights, waiting there in the morning when you ate your breakfast.

Zack reached for the phone. "I don't think Kate Martel's going to break," he said. "She's a redhead and Irish."

He reached her at her office. The name, Brenda Ralles, was unfamiliar, she said; also the Morse Avenue address.

When Zack hung up, Rip said, "You're working the case, but if you want me to come along tonight—"

"Tell you what," Zack said. "Ginny has been wondering what happened to you. How about coming to the house for dinner and canasta? We'll have until ten thirty. Time for a good game."

They filled out their Number Three cards, noting they were leaving the office at 5:55 and would be at Brenda Ralles' apartment at 11:00 . . .

The buildings, disgorging their mobs, held the sticky heat of the early fall day in their canyons, and also its smells. It was this crowded time of day when Rip felt the longing of a corraled wild horse for the blue mesas. He was range-born. He had sat the saddle soon after learning to walk, and at twelve had bulldogged his first steer. It was seven years since he had joined the Bureau, and in those seven years the Bureau had found his slow, methodical-thinking ways as effective in trailing criminals as they had been in rounding up stray mavericks.

Zack's wife, Ginny, was undismayed at having a guest for dinner. She was a busy, competent individual of 23, who looked none the worse for having spent the day wrestling with their two-year-old daughter. As usual, she won at canasta. Rip was trailing her by fourteen hundred points and Zack by eighteen hundred when they quit the game.

They parked the car a block away from the address on Morse Avenue, and walked toward the lake. They heard the brush of leaves as their feet stirred them, and the low talk of a boy and girl on a doorstep. Otherwise, they moved through stillness.

To Rip it was like a thousand other nights. Yet always the feeling

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possessed him, not of foreboding, but of wondering what was behind the door they soon would walk through. It was never the same twice, and yet it was always the same. People talked, words came spilling out, and by those words, rather than by the Tommy guns or the .38s, killers were captured. Words chased men, harried them, cornered them, broke their spirits, sent them to the chair.

Zack paused to light a cigarette, and for a moment his face was suspended in the thin glow. He looked at his watch, and reported it was exactly 11:00.

They walked away from the street light and down the alley. The shadows of the night vanished into still greater darkness until their feet had to explore each step. Rip was conscious of a thin crescent moon hung low in the sky, of muted light against the shades pulled in Brenda Ralles's apartment, of a prowling cat scurrying away before their intrusion.

He thought he heard a door close. It wasn't a slam, but a firm, determined closing. He caught Zack's sleeve, and they stopped and listened. There was only stillness.

Then the light flooded about them. The shade went up in Brenda Ralles's apartment, and the glare was like a spotlight.

The shot was nothing more than a crack. Zack turned about, a long slow turn, his hand jerking in spasm as it sought for his .38. Rip dropped, pulling Zack with him. The heavy jolt as Zack struck the ground told Rip that Zack had caught the slug.

Rip heard a woman screaming, and it was near, maybe at the window. She was shrieking something, but the words wouldn't fit into sensible sounds.

Rip struggled to crawl out of the light, to pull Zack with him, but Zack was too much for him. He waited, his finger pulling back on the trigger of his .38 as far as he dared, his eyes scanning the hedge; he was certain the shot had come from the shrubbery.

The gravel stung his face as a slug ripped into the ground before him. He saw a black blotch in the passageway, and pulled the trigger. The blotch was running, and he fired again. But each time Zack, groaning and twisting, touched his gun arm.

Light flooded out of many windows now, and he heard people shouting, running. He was lying prone, the .38 still in his hand. As gently as he could, he pushed Zack's weight from him, and knelt by him. He felt Zack's pulse. There was nothing to feel.

When the carnival that violent death inevitably attracts had drifted away, Rip sat on a hard, straight chair in Brenda Ralles's apartment.

The medic had pronounced Zack dead. The photographers had taken pictures. The morgue attendants

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had removed the body. FBI agents and homicide detectives had questioned everyone in the two buildings flanking the alley. The back door had been dusted for prints, and a plaster of Paris cast made of a lone footprint in a flowerbed.

Roadblocks had been set up in the streets, the area barricaded. Radio cars had prowled the alleys and thoroughfares, their spotlights exploring every shadow where the hunted might hide. At last the stillness of night had closed in again.

Lieutenant Jake Kuppel of Homicide was the first to question Brenda Ralles. He offered to withdraw when Rip came in, but Rip motioned him to stay. Kuppel was patient, plodding, persistent, a thin man in his early thirties with eyes as cold as a subpoena.

Rip introduced himself to the girl, who was sitting taut on the divan. "I'm John Ripley. I'm the agent you talked with this afternoon."

She looked at him quickly out of wide blue eyes. The shadow makeup gave them their bigness. She wore a scarlet chenille robe gathered tightly at her waist. "I talked with you?"

He recognized the inviting huskiness that had come over the phone. "Yes, when you called the FBI."

"I don't understand," she said slowly. "I didn't call the FBI."

Rip felt himself tense. Zack's death had shaken him to his depths. For a brief moment he again had hit the beach at Normandy. He had not yet recovered.

"At four twelve this afternoon," he said, "you called the FBI. You talked with me. You said you had information about an important matter. You asked if agents would call here at eleven."

Her hands sought comfort in each other. She was trembling. "Honestly, Mr. Ripley, I didn't."

"I heard your voice. I'm hearing it now. It's the same."

She managed a rather desperate smile. "I don't know what we're talking about," she said.

"You raised the window shade?"

"Yes, I thought I heard something outside."

Lieutenant Kuppel aroused himself from his silence. "Do you always raise the shade if you think a prowler's outside?"

"I—I don't know. I did tonight."

"It was dark out there," Jake Kuppel continued. "The killer had to have light. You raised the shade. He fired the shot."

She raised a trembling hand to her throat.

"You're scared," said Kuppel. "What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not scared . . . I mean, of course, I am. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Sure, you'd be—after you got an FBI man out here and your boy friend killed him."

"I didn't, I tell you!"

Kuppel quit the attack, and became fatherly, inviting confidences. "Okay, you didn't. But someone's

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using you. Somebody tricked you into this."

Rip thought he noted an uneasiness about her that had nothing to do with Kuppel or him. Her eyes kept turning to the kitchen door.

He went into the kitchen. It was not more than six by seven. A window opened on the back area, and it was up a few inches.

When he returned, she was saying, "I want to phone Mr. Rainer. Can I?"

"Sure," said Kuppel. "Call your boss. Maybe he will talk some sense into you."

However, she made no move toward the telephone. She continued to sit rigidly upright on the divan. It was then Rip noticed the bleeding.

"I see you've hurt your head." Blood was oozing from behind her right ear.

Her voice invited sympathy. "Yes, I did. I slipped on that throw rug, and hit my head on the phone table."

"You slipped?" Rip asked. His eyes diagrammed the situation. She would have missed the table by a foot.

"Yes," she said quietly.

Under their questioning she told them she had worked at the office until nine, preparing a brief. She had eaten alone, come home about 10:00, arriving around 10:30. She had undressed, washed out lingerie, picked up a magazine, and then fallen asleep on the divan. The next she knew some noise had awakened her.

The narration seemed to calm her. She turned her eyes on Rip. "Mr. Ripley," she said, "you must believe me. I didn't call you, I didn't ask for you to come here tonight. I don't understand—"

She couldn't finish the sentence. Kuppel called another detective in and withdrew with Rip, to confer in the hallway.

"What do you think, Lieutenant?" Rip asked.

Kuppel shrugged. "Hard to figure. She looks innocent. And these kids fool you. Sometimes they are innocent." He added, "Are you sure of the voice? Maybe somebody used her name."

Rip frowned. "Of course I'm not sure. Nobody could be. A voice isn't a fingerprint."

Kuppel said he could hold her on suspicion, but not for long. Her boss would effect a release. Rip knew that, under Federal law, she had to be arraigned at once after she was taken into custody, and they had no evidence on which to base a charge.

They decided on a tail job. "A loose one," said Kuppel. "If she's the girl who phoned you, she'll be watching for a tail. Better to lose her than have her hole up on us."

When they returned to the living room, Kuppel asked, "Got any folks?"

"My mom. Up in Wisconsin. Ever hear of Marchfield?"

She was trying hard to be a wom-

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an, but what Rip saw before him was a frightened youngster.

"You need to think this out," he said. "I'll be back tomorrow."

It was almost 3:00 when they left. As Rip closed the door, he glanced at the memo pad by the telephone. His name was scrawled on the pad: *John Ripley.*

He took the news to Ginny. She came down the stairs in faded pajamas, thinking Zack had lost his key. Then she saw Rip, and was at once fearful.

"Where's Zack?" she asked. He told her, and it was hard. The canasta pad Zack had kept score on was still on the card table, and his half-finished ginger ale on the mantel.

Rip thought of telling her Zack had died a hero in the best tradition of the FBI. Fidelity, bravery, integrity. The FBI words. But that was for the newspapers. He put coffee on the stove, and phoned another agent's wife to come over.

The city was beginning to push back the covers as Rip drove to the office in a pre-dawn light. He thought, how treacherous and quixotic life is. You plan a raid on a farmhouse where a desperado is holed, and he walks out with his hands up. You go on a routine call into a quiet neighborhood, and a bullet sings. You never know what's behind any door, what's in any mind.

When he signed in, Peg asked, "Are you all right?" and he said, "Sure, Peg."

She was thinking it could have been Rip instead of Zack. She said, "The SAC wants to see you."

The SAC was what everyone called the Special Agent in Charge of the field office. He was a stolid, squared-off Kentuckian, who stood up each day to a wracking demand for quick decisions, running problems through a crackshot brain that hadn't erred in his 18 years with the Bureau.

The night had sharpened the lines about his eyes. He had spent most of it talking over the Bureau's private line to Washington.

"Come in, Rip," the SAC said. "I don't have to tell you how I feel about Zack—how we all feel. The Bureau wants his wife to know she has a job in Washington, if she wants it. I thought you might tell her after the funeral."

He continued, "The Bureau thinks we may find Zack's slayer in one of the cases he was investigating. He may have been close to knowing something, to catching someone. Perhaps in the Martel extortion affair, since this girl, Brenda Ralles, or someone posing as her, told you she had information.

"I want you to work this case out, Rip. I needn't warn you to be careful. I've asked Greggson Barker to help you. He's new, but you'll find him capable."

For Kate Martel the extortion

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case had begun eight nights before Zack's death, when the phone rang at five minutes after four in her well-ordered apartment on the northside.

She had awakened to the vague fright that comes with a phone ringing in the night. She said hello in a voice still drugged with sleep.

"East Chicago, Indiana, calling," said the operator. "Go ahead, please."

The man sounded far away. He said, "Katherine Martel?"

"Yes, this is she."

"You have ten thousand dollars in the First National Bank."

She felt a jab near her heart, and was fully awake. "Who is this?" she demanded.

"I'll do the talking. I want you to get that ten thousand in cash. Nothing bigger than twenties. You get it?"

"You're crazy," she said. "I don't know who you are, but if you think you're going to get Bill's insurance money that way—" She was standing very erect by the little telephone table.

"If you don't get the cash, something'll happen to your little girl."

She sagged against the wall, and said nothing.

"Now, listen. Get the money. I'll tell you in a few days where to take it."

She was stunned, but she said evenly, "All right, I'll have it, if you don't—"

"You have it, period. Don't get any screwy ideas you can ship the kid off somewhere. And don't hire a dick to guard her."

The click in the receiver had a dismaying finality to it.

She ran to Vicki's room, panic sweeping her. Vicki was sleeping soundly, a homely little mug with a round, freckled face and punched-in nose. Her soiled Panda was in the bunk bed beside her. Kate kissed her softly on the forehead.

"Oh, Bill," she whispered, thinking of Bill's hand in hers that night when Vicki, ill with pneumonia, reached the crisis. He had said later, "It's you, Kate, who's got the grit in this family."

Grit? He had died in Korea, fighting on Old Baldy. His medal was tucked away in the bottom drawer of the chest, under her slips. It was Vicki's to have when she was older—it and the newspaper clippings that already, barely a year old, were drying out, as her life had dried out.

The window, open a few inches at the bottom, caught her eye. Quickly, as though some hand might raise it at any moment, she locked it tight. She looked out on tree-filtered moonlight, across to the window where Emil Shurk and his wife were sleeping. Emil had said, "If you ever need us, scream." Emil had been an arm to hold to this past year, collecting the insurance, filling out her income tax return, advising her.

She walked to the living room,

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found her cigarettes, and lighted one. The cuckoo chirped that it was 4:30.

Uncle Max would be along shortly from his night watchman job. She had to decide what to do before he returned, or he would take over in his whining, abused way.

As she figured it, she had two choices: she could tell no one, pay over the $10,000, and pray the extortionist kept his word. Or she could go to the police and hope she wasn't found out.

Either way she was gambling. She was dealing with someone who was desperate but a coward, someone who never would take the money from her with a gun. Either course she chose, he might kill Vicki if he thought he was being betrayed.

It was Bill's money, not hers. It would be Vicki's for her college years, for the education she and Bill had planned.

The police. Odd that she hadn't thought of Zack Stewart right off. She rubbed the cigarette out in the silver Mexican hat, and dialed a number.

"FBI," the girl said. Kate asked for Special Agent Zack Stewart. She remembered his name because he had called at her office at Pierce-Cabot's a few weeks before, to make a routine loyalty check on a friend who was seeking a government post.

The FBI girl said she wasn't permitted to give out Agent Stewart's home telephone number, but if the matter was urgent she would have him call.

In about five minutes he was on the phone. Before he let Kate go into details, he assured himself she was on a private line. He asked the names of her business associates and friends, her neighbors at the apartment house, and her baby-sitters. He wanted to know where she bought her groceries, her newspaper, her drugs; the beauty parlor she went to, and the repairmen she hired for her television set.

He suggested she leave her mail untouched in her box until he could give her a supply of transparent envelopes. "If the extortionist writes," he said, "we may get fingerprints if you handle the envelope by its edges and put it in one we give you."

He asked for a photograph of Vicki, and the wingbeat of fear fluttered in her. He would have use for a picture of Vicki only if something happened to the child.

He continued, "These cases usually follow a pattern. We have about fifteen hundred of them a year. The chances are you won't hear from this man for several days. He wants to break you down with worry, so you will do exactly as he says. It's a cruel, vicious business."

She couldn't bring herself to turn out the lights. She lay thinking, struggling to match the voice on the phone to that of a friend or an acquaintance. It occurred to her that the man had talked like an actor trying to play a truck driver.

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When she heard Uncle Max's key in the door, she turned on her side and closed her eyes. She heard him padding into the bedroom, and felt his hand on her shoulder, shaking her.

"What are the lights on for?" he asked.

She pretended to rouse herself. "I guess I forgot."

"A fine thing! Burning up Bill's money that way." He flicked the light switches off, grumbling.

If he weren't Bill's uncle . . . She would have to do something about him. She couldn't have him around Vicki any longer.

Special Agent Greggson Barker checked in at 8:20. Rip instinctively liked the strength in the new man's grasp. "Glad to know you," he said. "Did the SAC tell you what we're doing?"

Barker nodded. He was a stocky blond, on the short side. "Homespun," Rip thought.

"I've reviewed the extortion case Zack was working," Rip said, motioning him to a chair. "Zack traced the call to a pay phone in an East Chicago tavern, but ran into a dead end there."

The telephone cut Rip short. The call was from Lieutenant Kuppel. "The dame committed suicide," he said.

"Brenda Ralles?"

"That's right. She gave her tail the slip this morning on the way downtown. We searched her apartment, then. Found a note on the living-room table. Want to hear it?"

Kuppel read: "'Dear Mom: I'm crying tonight, Mom, and want you to hold my hand like you did when I was a little girl. I know I should have stayed in Marchfield and helped you with the dress shop, but I wanted to get away.

"'I'm in trouble now. I cannot go on living the way I have. I wish I could come back to you in Marchfield, but if I did they would find me and I would bring disgrace on you.

"'I will not be around when you get this note. I am going to walk into Lake Michigan. I think it will be the easiest way. I love you.'"

Kuppel read it without expression. He added, "It's not signed, but it's in her handwriting. We checked."

Rip said, "Anything else?"

"The prints we took last night washed out. The footprint belongs to the gardener. The fingerprints match the tenants'. But we got a slug from Zack's body. It's from a three-fifty-seven magnum."

"Great Geronimo!" said Rip. The weapon was one of tremendous velocity, penetration, and shocking power, with an effective range of 200 yards and a maximum of 2700.

"What does the tail log show?" Rip asked.

"She turned her lights out last night at three forty. Left the apartment at six fifty this morning,

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We've radioed the cars patrolling the Lake Michigan area. They're searching the shore line."

"How long since she shook the tail?"

"'Bout an hour. I'll keep you posted, Rip."

For the next half hour Rip and Barker mapped out leads and got off reports to the Bureau in Washington and other field divisions. They were leaving when the switchboard girl put through another call from Kuppel.

"The boys found Brenda Ralles' clothes," he said. "She dropped them a few feet from the water in that little park at the end of Morse Avenue."

"How about the body?"

"Not yet. But the footprints are there, pointing into the lake."

"I didn't think she'd do it," said Rip.

"Me neither. She didn't look the kind."

Shortly afterward Rip and Barker checked out a Bureau car at a garage down the street, and drove to Morse Avenue.

Several agents and two of Kuppel's detectives were inside Brenda Ralles's apartment. Rip introduced Barker, and they then went to the service yard. Near the passageway through the hedge, about where Rip figured the slayer had stood, he filled a cylindrical ice-cream container with soil that was damp from the watering the gardener had given it the night before. If the killer was captured soon, he might still be carrying microscopic particles on his shoes.

"We'll ask the Lab for a petrographic examination," Rip explained. "Soils differ, even soils sometimes only a few hundred feet apart. It wouldn't be conclusive evidence, of course, the way fingerprints are."

He clipped the hedge, on the possibility that pollen might have brushed into the slayer's clothes, and then he noticed the window sill where someone taking aim might have leaned. The window opened on the kitchen of Brenda Ralles's apartment, and the paint was beginning to powder. Using a knife as a scraper, he gathered a specimen of the powder in an envelope.

"Paints seldom weather the same," he said. "The paint on this sill hasn't oxidized exactly the same as on the sill around the corner. Maybe this one got more rain, or wind, or had more undercoats, or was affected in its aging by other factors."

The day had been one of snippish annoyances for Kate. The Belgian firm had canceled out on the lacework she had scheduled as an October special, and she had fallen behind in the race with the appointment book.

It was the ninth day, too; more than 200 hours of torment and speculation.

Tonight Uncle Max was in one

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of his moods. He followed her to the bedroom. She had wanted to undress and shower, but now she had to listen.

"That woman's got to go, Katherine," he said. "Vicki and me were goin' to the movies this afternoon, but she made a row."

"That woman" was Mrs. Downes from upstairs. The morning after the call had come, Kate had stayed home to ask Mrs. Downes if she would come and look after Vicki. "Uncle Max is a little too old for children," Kate explained.

Mrs. Downes grasped the situation in a few words. She was a large, robust woman, about 60, who would have looked at home trudging alongside a covered wagon.

"I want you to keep Vicki in sight at all times," Kate said. "Even if Uncle Max wants to take her some place, she isn't to go."

Now Uncle Max was saying, "You're wastin' poor Bill's money, hirin' that woman. Me and Vicki was doin' all right before."

"Vicki's a little girl," Kate said. "She needs a woman's attention."

"Bosh and conflunderation! That woman locks these doors like we was—"

She stalled, and he left, mumbling something about the next thing she would be ordering him out of the house, an old man, Bill's own flesh and kin. The apartment shook as the door slammed.

Around 7:00, while Vicki was watching television, Kate listened for Emil Shurk's footsteps in the hallway. He passed at this time every night on his way to the tavern. Kate had seen him there, sitting alone, having a few beers and enjoying television and the gaiety of the younger crowd.

It was his escape from his wife and two teen-age daughters, who forever wanted more than he could provide from his meager salary as an accountant at a shoe factory. They harried him to ask for a raise. They couldn't understand his hesitation, but Kate did. If the factory refused him, it would end his hopes. He preferred the myth that the factory was having a difficult time, and he was being "loyal."

As he passed tonight, she asked him in. "I'm always bothering you," she said apologetically. His smile showed the lift it gave him to feel he was helpful to someone.

"It's about Uncle Max," she said. "I've got to do something."

He listened quietly as she talked. Uncle Max had helped her and Bill get started. He had bought the furniture for the apartment. And he had never let her forget it. She and Bill were having a financial struggle, what with Bill just out of school. Max had suggested he rent a room from them for $50 a month, and they had welcomed him and his $50.

Emil hesitated, uncertain. Then he said, "Bill would place your happiness above everything, Kate. You can't have that happiness with Max

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around. It isn't as though he couldn't take care of himself. He earns good money and has good health."

"But he is Bill's uncle."

Emil wandered around in a gibberish of double talk. Kate knew what he was trying to tell her: that she couldn't live in the past with a dead man.

But Bill wasn't dead. He was with her; he'd had his hand in hers at Vicki's birthday party a few weeks ago; he had sat across from her the day of their anniversary when she had dined alone.

As Emil was leaving, he said, "By the way, do you want to draw your interest on the ten thousand? I know a stock that—"

"No," she answered quickly. "No, I want to leave it."

He looked at her a moment, thoughtfully, before he left.

Kate hustled Vicki to bed, heard her prayer, and felt the strength of Vicki's little arms about her as she hugged her good night. Vicki slept with her now—since that night.

She stretched out on the sofa in the living room. Maybe if she read a book, it might help.

The knock came then, a soft, exploratory tap. She was on her feet, standing very still. She called, "Who is it?"

She could barely catch the name, "Dave." She took a second to glance at herself in the hall mirror, give her hair a fluff, and straighten the collar of her dress.

When she opened the door, Dave Millson stood there, his light sandy hair cropped, his blue eyes troubled, his bulky frame lacking the Marine snap it usually had.

"May I come in?" he asked. He added with a hesitant smile, "If I'm a good boy?"

She swung the door open. "You're welcome any time, Dave. You know that."

He walked ahead of her into the living room. "I had one too many the other night. That was why—"

"Sure," she said, laughing easily. He was lying to cover up. He had had only one drink when he slipped his arm around the small of her back, and the other around her neck. It had happened so quickly that his lips were on hers before she could struggle. She had flailed at him with her free arm, and kicked at him. But it was as though she were a child, helpless in his grasp, until he released her.

Dave said, "I'm sorry, Kate. I got carried away. I hope—"

"Let's forget it ever happened," she told him. She sat beside him on the sofa. She didn't want him to think she held it against him. She didn't believe it would happen again. He knew now how she felt about him, and Bill.

He was Bill's friend, although she had never known him until after Bill went. A few days after the story broke in the papers, about how Bill, wounded, had captured 22 Reds singlehanded, Dave had come around.

"I'm Dave Millson," he said.

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"Borrowed thirty bucks from Bill before he left. Thought maybe you could use it."

After that he had dropped in occasionally. He and Bill had been childhood pals, and she found comfort in his tales of Bill's boyhood.

"Our folks never paid much attention to us," said Dave. "We had this gang in high school. Used to roam the streets nights, looking for other gangs to fight and cops to bait. Bill and I got caught once but our folks got us out."

Now she wondered if Dave didn't still have a little of the gang in him, believing you took what you wanted, any way you could.

He asked about Uncle Max and Vicki. He had brought a present for Vicki, a monkey that did acrobatics when it was wound up. He had brought candy for Kate. He seemed genuinely repentant.

After he had gone she returned to the novel. But the words ran together, and then the lines. She fell asleep on the sofa.

The telephone awakened her, setting off an explosion inside her. The FBI men had instructed her to push the switch under the phone table before she lifted the receiver. She found the switch, turned it, and then picked up the receiver.

She recognized the man's voice when he asked, "Katherine Martel?"

He scarcely waited for her to answer before he asked, "You got the ten thousand?"

"Yes," she said. She was reading lines as in a play—lines written by the FBI.

"In twenties?"

"Yes, in twenties."

"Listen. Here's what you do."

She was glad she didn't have to remember. Somewhere his words were being recorded. The FBI men had said something about wanting his conversation verbatim, something about word patterns. She hadn't understood.

"Put the bills in a shoe box. Wrap the box up in a newspaper. You got that?"

"I've got it."

"You catch the midnight Southside from the Loop tomorrow night. Get off at the Morton Street stop. Walk west to the Hillcrest Cemetery. Wait at the gate fifteen minutes."

"Fifteen minutes," she repeated.

"After fifteen minutes you walk a block each way from the gate. Take your time, nice and easy. If you call the police—"

"I won't. I'll have the money. I'll be there. I'll wear my white wool coat so you'll recognize me."

"Listen, sister, you wear something dark—or else."

He was gone.

Kate took a deep breath, and it came easily for the first time in nine days. In less than 24 hours the long wait would be a bad dream to forget.

The midnight Southside. The Hillcrest Cemetery. Fifteen min-

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utes. Start walking. A shoe box wrapped in a newspaper.

Suddenly, she felt nausea churning inside her.

At one o'clock Rip and Barker saw Kate Martel at her office.

"I've got the jitters today," she said. "I'm scared I'll crack up tonight."

"You'll be all right when the time comes," Rip said. "It's the before part that's bad."

It was the first time he had seen her, and he found her to his liking. The almost prim way she sat in her chair, straight as a soldier, with her shoulders thrown back as if in defiance. The way she looked at him, forthright and without design. The way, too, she held herself together, refusing to let shock or fear stampede her.

How long, though, could she take it? She was intelligent. She knew there was a possibility that the extortionist had killed Zack Stewart, perhaps driven Brenda Ralles to suicide. What might he not do to her in the darkness of the cemetery tonight? Or to Vicki any night?

"Mrs. Downes will stay with Vicki tonight," she said. "I haven't told Uncle Max I'll be away from the house. He goes to work at ten."

She continued, "I haven't much time to get to the bank, if I'm going. I wasn't going to pay, but now I don't know, after all that's happened. What do you think?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, but we're not permitted to advise you. The Bureau has a rule about that. I think you can understand why."

"If I don't pay—"

"We'll make up a dummy package for you."

She stood up, walked to the window, then turned toward them. "I don't think Bill would want me to pay," she said. "So what comes next?"

He rose. "We'll fix up a shoe box for you, and send it over by messenger. I want to warn you, don't open it. We're putting a chemical inside that stains the hands."

"I won't."

"One more thing," he added. "Follow the instructions exactly. If you change, it'll not only throw the extortionist off, but us, too. And keep in mind that he may meet you on your way to the cemetery."

Back at the office they dictated reports, conscious of the clock's hands turning closer to midnight. As with the breaking of every big case, they were moved, as though by a physical force pushing them, to hasten their steps. And yet they were conscious, too, that there was violence buried in a man's thoughts, violence that a simple hurried mistake might set off.

So they tempered their pace when they studied the plans for that night, discussing every eventuality, seeking to peer into the mind

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of this extortionist with the blank face. Time and again, the Bureau had trapped a criminal by his own processes of thought rather than by a gun.

They diagrammed how they would post radio cars a half mile away, and mapped the streets they would bring them down, once the signal was given. They read the memos of agents who had surveyed the area, and decided to hide men in a Swedish grocery store across from the cemetery gate, in a mausoleum by the darkest corner, in an old car that had been parked in front of a house for months, and in a grave already dug.

They took Mrs. Downes into consideration, and discussed plans to safeguard Vicki if Mrs. Downes, by any faint chance, should be working with the extortionist.

As an excuse for asking Mrs. Downes to baby-sit at such a late hour, Kate had told her, without thinking, that she was putting in a brief appearance at a party. It came to her afterward that she would have to dress, or Mrs. Downes would think it strange. So she was leaving to keep a deadly rendezvous at a cemetery in her new green taffeta and a long, dark tweed coat.

"I may be late," she told Mrs. Downes, "but I should be back by two. Be sure to bolt the door after me.

"Oh, Bill," she whispered, "stay close to me."

In the hallway downstairs, while she was waiting for the taxi she had called, the pay telephone inside the door caught her eye. She found she had several coins in her purse. She dropped one in and dialed. Uncle Max's "Hello" creaked over the line. She had caught him dozing.

Quickly she hung up and dialed another number. Dave Millson was not sleeping; she could hear that raucous babble in the background which denotes a party in full sway.

Again she placed the receiver back on the hook without speaking. By the time the taxi moved alongside the curb, she had made certain that everyone was where he should be.

She asked the taxi driver to stop at the corner tavern. While he watched curiously, she walked briskly inside, glanced around as though hunting someone, and left. Emil Shurk, from his usual table well to the back, had stood up to beckon to her, but she pretended not to see.

With little traffic on the streets the taxi moved swiftly toward the Loop. Kate's thoughts hurried it on. Only another hour, and her world would be set right. She would wake up in the morning without that jab in her side, without that terrifying heaviness. She would leave for work with nothing more to think about than whether Vicki should start piano lessons this winter or next.

Not that she wasn't uneasy to-

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night, and apprehensive. But she was not panicky.

And then a thought overwhelmed her: suppose the FBI should fail to capture the man!

But that was silly. She was just torturing herself.

At Wells and Randolph she paid the driver, and walked the few steps to the train. For the first time she was conscious of the newspaper-wrapped package, and felt conspicuous carrying it against her party clothes.

She paused to see if anyone was trailing her, then ran up the steps. On the landing three people were waiting, a young couple too absorbed in themselves to notice her, and a husky, well-dressed man who never looked up from his newspaper.

The cars slid to a stop. They were crowded with late show-goers and night workers—a tired lot, some dozing, some staring vacantly, none talking except a foursome of exuberant teen-agers. Kate had a moment's fright when one of them, a girl overcome with laughter, knocked the box out of her hand.

"Scavenger hunt?" asked the boy friend, picking it up. Kate nodded, and clutched the box.

At the Morton Street stop, the coaches were almost deserted. Kate stood alone on a platform that was a long, narrow island of light. Then she saw the exit sign at the far end and hurried toward it.

On the street she walked west, encountered no one, seeing not a light in the homes of another era that lined themselves up with decaying dignity in the moonlight.

The cemetery came as a surprise. She had not realized she was walking so fast. The gate was in the center of the block.

She used her cigarette lighter to note the time, then stood waiting with a dread expectancy for the specified fifteen minutes to pass. Looking about her, she saw no life, and heard none, except once when a bird in flight stirred the free leaves. Yet she knew she was not alone; everywhere about her were FBI agents.

So unexpected was the glare of headlights blinding her that she had an urge to run. She imagined they held a moment on her, but the car rolled on past her, down the street. She strained to note the license number, but there was no taillight.

When she glanced at her watch, the second hand was beginning the fifteenth minute. As if she had to comply to the second with the instructions, she followed the hand around.

She had never been a casual walker, but now she forced her feet to dally. When she passed the mausoleum at the first corner, she stood a moment, pretending to study the high, old-fashioned iron fence closing in the graves.

She moved on. She was halfway

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down the block, entering an area where the trees shut out the moonlight, when she heard the first soft fall of footsteps. They were coming toward her down the sidewalk, moving with a slow scuff.

She stood still, unable to advance to meet them. They passed her by, steps too tired to notice her.

The farther she walked, the more insistently the premonition spoke out. Everything inside her cried against it. But by the time she reached the cemetery gates again, she no longer could deny it.

The extortionist had failed her.

She walked on and on, hopelessly. She never knew how many times she covered the still, dark treadmill.

The whisper startled her by its nearness. She couldn't exactly place it, but it was close by and in the cemetery.

"Mrs. Martel," it said. She stopped, and it continued, "You might as well go home. He isn't going to show."

The next morning early Rip sat across from her at the office and sought to explain. But she was almost beyond caring.

"It's the terror racket, Mrs. Martel," he said. "The extortionist never intended to show. He wants to break you—your body, your mind, your spirit, until you will do anything he says. He built up your hopes by making a date to meet you, and then wrecked them. He sent you to a cemetery because a cemetery is a symbol of death . . . Are you listening, Mrs. Martel?"

"Yes," she said dully.

"You must listen because you've got to hold on. If you don't, Vicki's life—"

"Will he call again?"

"Call or write. He'll give you further instructions."

"When?"

"There's no way of telling," he said. He disliked being brutal. "It may be tomorrow. It may not be for a month, two months, maybe three."

"I can't wait," she said. "I can't go on this way."

Rip was awakened by Jake Kuppel at Homicide at 7:00, which made it an even four hours of sleep out of the 48.

"How about having a cup of coffee with me?" Kuppel asked.

"Can't until ten."

"Ten's okay. See you then."

As Rip dressed, he wondered what Kuppel wanted. The police lieutenant was all right—he never held out information on the FBI, and always consulted agents before taking action in a joint case.

At the office Rip looked over his file folder to see if any reports had been tossed back by the General Cases supervisor for correction, and then read memos dictated by agents who had spent the previous day at the scene of Zack's slaying.

An interior decorator who lived

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across the hall from Brenda Ralles had reported that Miss Ralles "always acted and talked proper, but a woman could see what she was up to." And a bank teller two doors down had said, "I saw a man leave her apartment at two in the morning about a week ago."

Rip skimmed over one paragraph because it seemed irrelevant. Of the 16 people interviewed, 12 mentioned that Brenda loved children. She bought them ice cream and toys, and took time to talk and joke with them.

He was to reprimand himself later for letting the paragraph pass. Nothing was ever irrelevant.

On the dot of 10:00, he and Barker walked in on Jake Kuppel.

"Figure we ought to start work on Brenda Ralles," Jake said.

"No body yet?" Rip asked.

"No. Naturally, too early to tell. May still wash up. Figured, though, why take a chance? What about broadcasting a missing persons on her?"

"Let's try it," Rip said.

Kuppel took a bundle out of a file drawer. "Thought you might want to send her clothes to the Lab," he said.

As Rip touched her dress, still scented with perfume, the girl took shape before him, as she had that night. It was strange, he thought, how quickly you forgot the features of a person once met; how quickly a whiff of perfume, a belt, a letter, brought her back.

"Thought we'd drop in on Brenda Ralles' boss, Jim Rainer," Rip said.

"You want to know about Jim Rainer?" Kuppel asked.

He leaned back until his swivel chair would have toppled with the shifting of another pound.

"Remember the first time I met him," Kuppel said. "I was a rookie pounding North Clark and I'd hauled a hood in. This brash kid comes beating up. He's an attorney and the hood's his first case. He threw a *habeas corpus* at me."

"A gangster's lawyer?" Rip asked.

"He was, but it bothered him that people looked on him as scum. He quit handling hood cases. Became a civil attorney. Nothing but paper work. Went legitimate." Kuppel laughed. "The smart ones discover crime doesn't pay enough."

It was nearly 11:00 when they called on Jim Rainer. He was working on a bankruptcy case. When he came around the desk to shake hands, they saw a heavy-set man with black, stubby hair and the face of a fighter.

"Good to meet you, Mr. Ripley, Mr. Barker. I've been expecting you to call about Miss Ralles. I wish I could help you. Don't know a thing."

"The agent who was killed was here to see you last Friday," Rip said. "Zack Stewart."

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Rainer spread out comfortably in a red-leather chair. "Yes, he dropped in to ask me about a hood. My heavens, man, I told him, I haven't seen the fellow in fifteen years. I haven't handled a criminal complaint in ten."

Barker turned the questioning to Brenda Ralles.

"You should ask my wife about her," Rainer said. "My wife thought Brenda was no good. Thought I was carrying on with her."

"Was she—?"

"A man has a different point of view."

"What was yours?"

"She wasn't bad. She just didn't know what morals were."

Barker got out his pipe. "Do you mind?" he asked. He took his time about filling it, letting Rainer talk.

"She wasn't much good as a secretary, but she was decorative. She'd give me one of those flouncy greetings mornings, and I'd forget my hangover."

He said he used to hear her dating over the telephone, but none of her boy friends ever came around.

Barker pretended concentration on his pipe. He asked, "Would you mind telling us where you were on Monday night?"

Rainer laughed. "I was wondering when you would get around to that. You check with Bill Barr. He's an attorney in the Civic Building. We worked together until about two o'clock on an inheritance case we had coming up the next morning."

Barker thanked him, and he and Rip stood up to go. Rainer moved his elephant frame from behind the desk, and placed an arm about Rip as he walked him to the door. If he only knew anything that would help them in trapping the slayer of Mr. Stewart he would be a happy man. It was a shocking, tragic thing.

Rip wanted to say, "You belong on the stage, Mr. Rainer." But the Bureau would not approve of sarcasm. He was an investigator dealing with cold objectivity in facts. He was as much a machine as the one in Washington that sorted fingerprint cards.

Downstairs he located a pay phone in a drug store, and asked the FBI switchboard operator to put him through to Peg.

"Any messages?" he asked.

"I have one here, from the Milwaukee field division." She read: "'RE: UNKNOWN SUBJECT, KILLING OF FEDERAL OFFICER. INQUIRY AT MARCHFIELD, WISCONSIN, DISCLOSED MRS. WENDELL RALLES, ALSO KNOWN AS WANDA RALLES, MOTHER OF BRENDA RALLES, DIED TWO YEARS AGO.'"

"Well, I'll be—" commented Rip. "Thanks, Peg."

Barker was waiting at the magazine stand. Rip said, "Looks like Brenda Ralles faked the suicide. At least, she faked that letter to her mother."

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The next morning at 6:00, the girl on the FBI switchboard roused Rip out of bed. Lieutenant Kuppel wanted to see him at once.

Rip found several detectives grouped about Kuppel's desk. Kuppel left them and guided Rip to a little moon-faced man in his fifties, sitting alone at the other side of the room.

Kuppel said, "This is George Wicker. Mr. Wicker, this is Special Agent Ripley of the FBI."

The little man rose. He looked like a misplaced leprechaun. "The FBI!" he exclaimed, widening his eyes.

"Mr. Wicker found the body—" Kuppel began.

"I am most honored," said the little man eloquently. "I had never expected to meet an FBI agent—"

"Let's sit down, Mr. Wicker," Rip said. As they went to a desk Kuppel whispered to Rip. "Out of four million people this character's got to find the body."

"Whose body?" asked Rip.

"Brenda Ralles'," said Kuppel.

"It was like I was telling the Lieutenant," began the little man, grinning. "I'm a chef at the Round-up—"

"He's a cook's assistant," said Kuppel.

The little man didn't mind. At that moment he and Special Agent John Ripley of the Federal Bureau of Investigation were the only people in the world.

"It was five minutes to twelve when I arrived for work. I know, because if I take the eleven twenty-four street car, I arrive as Georgia is starting to pick the gardenias—"

"She's a strip teaser," said Kuppel, "and has a costume made of gardenias. It has nothing to do with finding the body."

Barker joined them as the little man continued, "I was starting a batch of French fries when I heard the noise. It was like when I drop the top of the garbage can on the pavement. We have big garbage cans—they come almost to my shoulders.

"I walked out the back door and stood looking around—there's a street light about fifty feet away. I walked toward the garbage cans, and I scared someone, and he ran. I looked at the cans, and they all had their tops on. 'Oh, well,' I said, 'it's some kids out for no good.'"

Kuppel asked, "What time was it when you heard the noise?"

"Some time between two thirty and two thirty-five. The last show usually ends at two thirty, but now they've got a dog act that varies a few minutes, because dogs are dogs. I can't be precise, but I heard the music ending the—"

"That's close enough," said Kuppel. "Now let's jump to five o'clock."

"Well, I was cleaning up about five, and I went out into the alley with the garbage. I walked over to the second garbage can—we have four and we fill them up in order.

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I took the top off, and the alley light fell on her head and feet. She was doubled up. I touched her and I don't know how I was so calm! I walked back and said, 'Larry, there's a girl dead out there.' Larry thought I was kidding him—"

Kuppel walked away from the little man, Rip and Barker following. "She caught four slugs in her chest," Kuppel said. "Of course, we haven't a positive identification. We sent for her dentist. He's checking the fillings in the teeth against his X rays."

Rip said, "If she staged a phony suicide for us—"

Kuppel interrupted, "Then she didn't fool the killer any more than she fooled us!"

Barker said, "Why would she want us to think her dead?"

"Maybe it wasn't us," said Kuppel. "Maybe she wanted the killer to think she was dead."

Some time later they received the autopsy surgeon's report. It disclosed that Brenda Ralles had died between 6:00 and 11:00 the night before.

Out of the four shots fired two were recovered. The ballistics experts reported that they had been discharged from the same weapon that had killed Zack Stewart.

Kate Martel was pulling the dress over her hot, moist shoulders when she was conscious of Uncle Max standing in the doorway. "Yes?" she said sharply.

"I didn't rightly know you was dressing," he said, but there was no apology to the words. "I sorta wanted to have a word with you, Katherine."

She stepped into the closet. Confound Uncle Max! She had no privacy either of body or of thought. If her nerves weren't so shot—

"Yes, Uncle Max?" she said.

"I ain't never been one to go about tellin' other people their business," he said. "But when folks start to talkin', I wouldn't be doin' my duty by Bill's wife if I wasn't to come to tell her."

"Tell me what?" she asked, emerging from the closet in a hostess gown.

"People are beginning to wonder about you datin' that young Dave Millson, and sittin' around here nights."

"I'm not dating Dave Millson," she said. "He drops around, that's all. He was Bill's friend."

Uncle Max was hurt. "You haven't any right to get so all-fired mad at me, Katherine. When you and that goof sit around here nights without a soul in the place—"

She said as evenly as she could, "Uncle Max, I've had about enough."

"I ain't sayin' it, Katherine! You know I wouldn't go sayin' anything like that, even if I was a one to think it."

"Uncle Max!"

He stood his ground stubbornly. "That Dave Millson is hangin'

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'round here for no good. In my time I've seen many a young feller like him. He's after Bill's insurance money."

She pulled the comb through her hair in short, fast strokes. "He's not the only one," she said pointedly.

Only a month ago Uncle Max had come sniveling around, asking to borrow $2,000 for another of his fantastic schemes. For a week after she had refused, he moped. She had kept the incident to herself. She couldn't bring herself to mention it to the FBI.

Mulelike, Uncle Max plodded ahead. "That Millson's aimin' to get the ten thousand, and if he has to be takin' to wife a pretty young woman in the full bloom of life along with it—"

She threw the comb on the table and turned. "I'm Bill's wife," she said. "I want you to remember that. I want you to treat me with respect."

Uncle Max muttered something about "doin' his duty," and then slammed out of the house.

Vicki burst in shortly afterward in a veritable explosion of energy. She had spent the afternoon in Mrs. Downes's apartment, playing with Dusty, a black cat well intimidated by the children of the apartment building. Now Mrs. Downes, following her in, sensed Kate's fatigue and lured Vicki to the kitchen.

Kate thought angels must come in all sizes, for Mrs. Downes was one. But next week school would begin, and thinking about it paralyzed her. She had been dismayed to learn that the FBI had no funds for providing a guard.

Mr. Ripley had suggested she might want to employ a private detective, but had refused to recommend one, explaining that he was not permitted to do so. She liked Mr. Ripley. He was frank with her, when frankness was needed, but he was considerate, too.

Yet it wasn't as though she could confide in him as with an old friend. When the migraine headaches hit her, she felt that if there was someone she could pour her heart out to—perhaps Emil—it would ease the pain. She had given her promise, of course, to the FBI that under no circumstances would she disclose a word to anyone. Still, it surely wouldn't hurt with someone as close and trustworthy as Emil.

When the brisk tap came, she was washing lingerie in the bathroom bowl. She glanced at the bedroom clock, and saw it was 10:15. She opened the front door a few inches and looked out.

"Hello, Kate!" Dave said, smilingly sure of his welcome.

"Oh, Dave," she said, "I was going to bed. It was a brutal day at the store—"

"Listen, Kate, I've got news. I won't keep you long."

He brushed by her and dropped into a comfortable slouch on the sofa. As she closed the door she was

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trembling. He had no right to make so free with her apartment, to place her in this position.

He said, "You know that screwy old duck who lives down the hall and helps you with your income tax?"

"Emil Shurk? And he's no old duck, Dave."

"Okay, he's no old duck." He grinned.

"What about Emil?" she asked.

"I was down to the shoe factory today to sell his boss an insurance policy. We're old buddies. We were sitting there talking, and this old codger passes by the door. I said, 'I know that guy. He lives in the same apartment building as my girl friend does.' "

He glanced at her a bit sheepishly, then went on, "My pal says, 'That's Emil Shurk. He's our head accountant. We're giving him notice the first of the month. He's sixty-three.' You get it, Kate? They'd have to pay him a pension if they kept him until he's sixty-five."

She said, "I can't believe it."

The news lifted her out of her own orbit of fear and transplanted her into Emil's. Little things that he'd dropped in conversation now burgeoned large. The refrigerator his wife had bought, the television set the girls had demanded, the rent increase.

She said with quiet firmness, "Dave, I don't want you to say, even in joke, that I'm your girl friend. I'm Bill's wife, and it's the same as though he were coming back."

He looked as if she had slapped him, but she continued, "Dave, Uncle Max says the neighbors are talking. I like to have you come here, you know that, but maybe we shouldn't see each other so often."

He was on his feet, fixing his tie.

"Dave," she said, "I didn't mean to—"

By the time he reached the door he had recovered his composure. "Sorry, Kate," he said. "I didn't mean to talk out of turn."

"You will come back?"

"Sure," he said, holding out a hand, which she accepted.

Toward morning the headache worsened and awakened her. She lay listening to the night sound and thinking that nights are far from being quiet. They're noisy; only the volume is turned low.

Her thoughts were never long from Dave Millson. He was so unlike Bill—brash, irrepressible, thoughtless. Yet, in the year she had known him he had helped to lighten her loneliness.

She needed someone to take her to dinners and parties, someone with whom she could feel easy and natural. She wondered if it were possible for a woman to have such a friendship with a man, or was a woman always something to possess?

At 6:30, Vicki aroused like a

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pack of Indians riding out of ambush. At 7:00, Mrs. Downes bustled in to prepare breakfast, and by 8:10, Kate was hurrying down the hall, repairing the damages wrought by Vicki's hug.

She was partly through the street door when she noticed a letter sticking out of the panel of mail boxes in the hallway. It was protruding from her slot. It was a long brown envelope that hadn't been pushed all the way in.

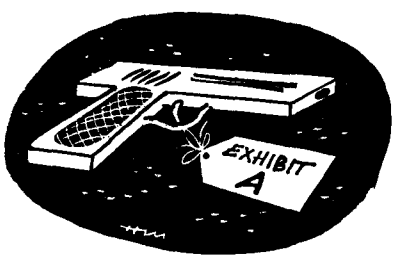
The moment she took the envelope out, and saw the printing on the front, she knew.

Her name and address had been clipped from newspaper headlines, letter by letter, and pasted on. As she ran her finger under the flap, ripping it, she knew she shouldn't be doing that, but no power could have stopped her.

More letters, cut from newspapers, were pasted on a sheet of ordinary plain white paper. She walked, mechanically, back upstairs.

The message read: UNABLE MEET YOU AT CEMETERY. PARK CAR ONE A.M. THURSDAY MORNING SOUTHEAST CORNER MILLIRON AND WRIGHT STREETS UNDER ELM. PUT SHOE BOX ON CAR FLOOR AND LEAVE CHILD IN FRONT SEAT. LEAVE CAR ONE HOUR. DO NOT RETURN BEFORE TWO A.M. CHILD WILL BE LEFT ON FRONT SEAT AND NO HARM COME IF YOU LEAVE MONEY.

(*Continued on page 99*)



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It was not at all a promising investigation for Rand, the Double-C man, head of the Department of Concealed Communications; he had no faith in it, but it had to be checked out and followed through—and it could be a case with tremendous international complications . . . Here is the eighth in the new series of spy-and-counterspy stories, and it has the same narrative grip, the same immediacy, of a cause célèbre *in this morning's newspaper . . .*

THE SPY WHO WORKED FOR PEACE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

RAND, THE DOUBLE-C MAN, remembered the name as soon as he saw it in the newspaper dispatches. Martin Dime—it was the sort of name that stuck in one's memory, even after five years. Rand hadn't been in charge of Concealed Communications at the time, but he'd been in the department. Martin Dime, coming home to England after five long years. On a peace mission, the papers said.

Everyone remembered the Dime Commission, and its supersecret inquiry into British weapons development. Martin Dime had been a trusted member of Her Majesty's government five years ago, then suddenly he left his wife and children and boarded a plane for Moscow. The shock waves of Dime's defection to Russia had traveled around the world, causing consternation in Washington and something like glee in Eastern capitals. Only one thing was certain about the whole affair—everyone agreed Martin Dime would never dare to show his face in England again.

But now Martin Dime was coming back.

"What do you make of it?" Hastings asked.

Rand lit one of the American cigarettes that were his only vice. "Rather depends on whether he was a traitor or simply a defector."

"Is there any difference?"

Rand studied the burning tip of his cigarette. "A great deal, in one sense. If Dime went to Moscow with a batch of secret information, I think we can reasonably suppose that he's returning on some sort of mission for them. But there was never any actual evidence of treason—not indictable evidence, at any rate. Perhaps he sincerely realized his mistake, and now he's coming home."

But Hastings shook his head. "He hardly sounds as if he's realized any mistake, not with all his spoutings about world peace."

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"Being for peace doesn't make a man a Communist."

"But he lived with them for five years!"

Rand sighed and stubbed out his cigarette. "All right, what do you want me to do about it? Frankly, I can't see it as a case for Double-C, in any event. You certainly don't expect him to land in London on a peace mission and immediately start sending back messages in code or cipher to Moscow."

"What if—" Hastings began, and then stopped. Perhaps in that moment the thing seemed too fantastic even to him. Then he hurried on. "What if all Martin Dime's writings and speeches during his government days here were really a cleverly concealed method of transmitting information to the Russians?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand quite what you're driving at," Rand said.

Hastings opened his brief case and withdrew a spiral-bound collection of memeographed sheets more than an inch thick. "I took this out of the file on the way up here. They're copies of nearly one hundred speeches delivered by Dime in the eighteen months before he defected—all during the lengthy Dime Commission hearings. These were all distributed to the press, and duly reported in our daily papers."

"You think they contain some sort of messages?"

"I believe it's at least a possibility, Rand. We know from our own agents that the Russians received regular reports from someone involved in the Dime Commission hearings. With Dime out of the country and safe with the Russians, we never bothered to examine these speeches as we should have, but now that he's coming back I think your department should have a go at it."

Rand could think of a half dozen reasons why the theory was highly unlikely, but he accepted the portfolio of Dime's speeches. His men were not too busy, and it might be good training for them. "Very well. Anything else, Hastings?"

"Yes. We need someone to stick with Dime while he's in London. I believe you were in the University with him."

Rand threw down his pencil. "That was twenty years ago, for heaven's sake! And I never knew the man—don't even remember seeing him."

"Nevertheless, you have something in common. He might resent you less than an obvious counter-intelligence man. We'll arrange for you to meet him at the airport."

"I'm supposed to shepherd him around London and be charming all the while my department is trying to uncover enough evidence to charge him with treason?"

"If you must put it that way," Hastings said.

"I don't like it. And I'm damn

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sure you haven't authorization from higher up to involve me like this."

Hastings tried once more, using his most fatherly voice. "Look at it this way, Rand. If Concealed Communications does turn up something in those speeches, you'd want to have your finger on him. You wouldn't want him dining with the Prime Minister when the word comes he's a traitor."

"You're damn sure of it, aren't you, Hastings?"

The older man shrugged. "It's just that men like Martin Dime don't usually come back."

Rand met Dime at the airport and was surprised by the sight of a vigorous man with silver-gray hair accompanied by a smartly dressed young woman still in her early thirties. Somehow after five years in Moscow he'd expected a shabby man shuffling off the plane with a paper parcel wrapped in string.

"Rand, you say? I don't remember you from the university." Martin Dime had acknowledged the introduction with a brief show of irritation, as if he'd expected to be met by someone higher up—or by no one at all.

"Just a formality, you realize, Mr. Dime." The man made Rand uncomfortable. "We have to check you out. After all, you did defect."

"Nonsense! I resigned from the government and moved to Moscow, but I have retained my British citizenship. I have done nothing to give aid or comfort to the enemy, nothing to harm my country. Whatever I did, I did in the name of world peace."

The young woman spoke up then. "What is this foolishness? What do they think you did, Martin?"

He turned to smile at her, then remembered an introduction was called for. "Mr. Rand, my wife—Gretta Dime."

"Mrs. Dime." Rand acknowledged the introduction with a slight bow. The woman was striking, if not pretty, and she carried herself well in clothes that might have graced a Paris model. "Our reports did not indicate your remarriage," Rand said awkwardly.

"Gretta was my secretary," Dime said. "She accompanied me to Moscow, and we were married as soon as my divorce was final."

And there it was, Rand thought, as simple as that. No defection, no treason—just a middle-aged man running off with his secretary. He silently cursed Hastings for the whole useless assignment.

"I'll be spending some time with you over the next several days," Rand told him reluctantly. "What are your plans?"

Martin Dime allowed himself a slightly superior smile. "I have a personal message for the Prime Minister—a specific proposal for lessening world tensions."

"You mean you're bringing a message from the Russians?"

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"You might say so, yes."

Rand rode into London with them. He left them at their hotel, promising to be in touch with them later in the day. Then he went back to his office to see Hastings.

Rand had helped Hastings on a number of internal security matters during the past few years, and the two men were quite close in an odd and tacit way. Rand respected the older man's judgment and intuition, which was the only reason he'd placed any credence at all in Hastings' suspicions of Dime's speeches. Now, waiting for Hastings to appear, he outlined the problem with a young man named Harry Thorne, a recently arrived trainee in the Department of Concealed Communications.

"It's probably nothing, Harry, but Hastings wants us to check, anyway. Here are press-release copies of all the speeches Martin Dime delivered to various groups in the eighteen months before he left England. Close to a hundred of them. I want you to go over them carefully for anything unusual—especially any reference to the Dime Commission hearings on British weapons development."

Harry Thorne was very young, with sandy hair and a ruddy complexion that the girls in the department found attractive. "You mean he'd make an outright mention of secrets in his talks, sir?"

"Of course not. But it's our job to make certain there's nothing concealed."

"Why would he have to send them information when he was going to leave for Russia?"

"If Hastings is correct, he may not have planned to leave until our people became suspicious. Now that five years have passed and nothing's come to light in the press, he may feel it's safe to return."

"I'll get to work on it, sir."

"Good boy." Rand smiled as Harry Thorne left his office, trying to remember when he'd been that young.

He was staring out the window at the barges on the Thames when Hastings entered. "You wanted to see me, Rand?"

"Yes, I did. There was nothing in the reports about Dime marrying his ex-secretary."

"It was in the comprehensive file. You just read the summary. Does it matter?"

"Only that it gives Martin Dime a completely logical reason for leaving the country that has nothing to do with defecting to the Russians. What happened to his ex-wife?"

"I think she moved to America."

"Then maybe that's another reason why he felt it a good time to return. He's serious about this peace mission, you know—says he has a message from the Russians."

"Papers got wind of it yet?"

"We avoided them at the airport, but they'll surely be at his hotel."

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Hastings frowned. "Your staff is working on those speeches?"

"Yes. But I don't think we'll find anything."

"You give him a clean bill of health and it'll be good enough for me." Hastings rose to leave. "But Rand—"

"Yes?"

"The Prime Minister wants a report from us before he agrees to receive Dime. He doesn't want to be placed in an awkward position."

"I can understand that."

"Stay with Dime, and stall him until you have a report ready. This is important, Rand."

He nodded. Everything was important. They were living in important times.

An April fog had settled over the city by nightfall, and Rand dined at the hotel with Martin Dime and his wife. The conversation was strained but fairly steady, and the food was good. Rand began to relax a little.

"London weather is just as bad as I remember it," Dime commented. "I come from the north of England myself, the only civilized place to live."

"Think you'll go back there?"

"Some day, when peace comes." He reached over to grasp Gretta's slim hand. "If we live to see it."

"You must realize your position," Rand began, suddenly deciding to lay some of his cards on the table. "You were the chairman of a highly sensitive and secret commission. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, you left wife, family, position, and went to Russia."

"There was a reason, as Gretta could tell you."

"We were in love," she explained. "We still are—very much."

"But such a thing is also called defection. You must know you were suspected of supplying the Russians with details of British military spending and a number of experimental new weapons."

"And Mr. Rand, you must know that by the time I went to Moscow the gist of the commission hearings was public knowledge. The newspapers had all carried accurate accounts of what went on. And the government itself had already announced its decision on the new jet fighter."

"But nothing was ever announced about the atomic tests."

"We are not testing now."

"We were five years ago. The Dime Commission had information that was available nowhere else."

Gretta Dime stubbed out her cigarette. "You are a very foolish man to accuse Martin of these things."

"I'm not accusing him of anything. But you must see how it looks."

"By the time I went to Moscow, the test ban treaty had been signed. My information was of no importance—it meant nothing."

He was right, of course, and that

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brought the inquiry back to the possibility of secret messages while he was still in England. That brought it back to Hastings and his idea about the speeches.

Rand changed the subject and made a comment about the fog. There was a way of checking on Dime's speeches which had just occurred to him. He would look into it in the morning.

Old newspaper files always made Rand sneeze. It was the sort of task he would usually have assigned to the newest member of the department—someone like young Thorne. But Thorne was busy poring over the sheaf of mimeographed speeches, and Rand hated to get him off the track. He tried to hold his breath as he flipped through the huge bound copies, wishing he'd gone to the library where they had the things on microfilm.

But he found what he wanted quickly enough. It was an account of one of Dime's old speeches. "Departing from his prepared text, Martin Dime went on to stress the urgency of exploring every avenue of negotiation with the Soviets, in an effort to lessen the threat of nuclear war."

All right. Rand leaned back on the straight wooden chair and thought about it. He flipped through the pages until he'd located two more accounts. They were more or less the same, and they told him three things which seemed to shatter Hastings' theory.

First, Dime often departed from his prepared text when delivering the speeches.

Second, the newspapers never reprinted the speeches in full, but contented themselves with brief excerpts or summaries, or sometimes with no mention at all.

And third, even in those days Martin Dime was beginning to preach his doctrine of world peace.

Rand closed the dusty volume with a bang. If Martin Dime had been using his speeches to transmit information to the Russians, it wasn't done through the press. It would have to have been done by the cumbersome device of having an agent in the audience, recording what was said or transcribing it somehow. Since a number of the speeches had been given before women's clubs and other closed groups, the whole theory seemed next to impossible.

Rand went back to the office and poked his head in on Harry Thorne's workroom. "Find anything?"

Thorne looked up from his desk, his eyes bleary. "Not a thing, sir. And I've been through the first thirty-two speeches. In most of them he doesn't even mention weapons. He just sort of rambles on about peace. And politics—they're all his friends and neighbors."

"Keep at it," Rand told him.

He went back to his desk to

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start on a report. One more day and he would be ready to clear Martin Dime.

Late that afternoon he saw them again. Dime was itching to begin his mission, and he'd taken his wife for an unofficial visit to his old office. Rand went along, more as a guard than a guide, it seemed. Those in the old office who remembered Dime were openly bitter at his visit, and his stop at the Houses of Parliament was no more successful.

"I expected something different," Dime said as they crossed Westminster Bridge.

"You thought you were a national hero?"

"No, Mr. Rand, but I thought these people would at least realize what I was trying to do. They treat me like a traitor!"

"Some think you are," Rand told him honestly.

"See that water down there? Muddy, dirty, unfit for anything but its slow trip to the sea. That's the kind of drift this country is in! The whole world, in fact. I want to change the course of things. I spent five years trying to convince the Russians of it, and I think I finally made some progress. Do I have to spend five years back home too?"

Rand gazed down at the waters. "They're dirty, but they keep moving. Maybe they'll clean themselves in time. Is that why you went to Russia? To convince them?"

"I told you. I went with Gretta. We had to leave England, and that seemed a likely place, in view of my aims. I didn't defect. I even sent a letter to the *Times,* but to the best of my knowledge they never published it."

"I'm sick of all this talk," Gretta said. "If they don't want us here, we'll go back to Moscow."

Martin Dime nodded. "I have a message for the Prime Minister. If I cannot see him this week, we will leave."

"He's waiting for a clearance on you," Rand said. "Frankly, it should be coming through by tomorrow."

They walked for a while longer, because the warmth of spring was finally beginning to settle over the city, and everyone knew tomorrow would be better.

Rand was starting to type his final report that night when Harry Thorne knocked on the door. "It's almost ten o'clock, Harry. I thought you'd be gone by now."

"Wanted to finish those speeches, sir."

"Good work. Didn't find anything, did you?"

"Well, sir . . ."

"What?"

"There's one odd thing I'd like you to look at."

Rand followed him to the workroom.

Harry Thorne had a dozen or more of Dime's speeches spread

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out on the large table, and he picked up a ruler to point. "I think I mentioned, sir, that in a good many of his speeches he started out by referring to the audience as *friends* or *neighbors*. Well, I've checked this, and out of the eighty-nine speeches, the word *neighbors* appears near the beginning of fifty-five of them."

"And?"

"It's always in exactly the same place on the mimeographed page."

Rand felt his blood suddenly run cold. "What do you mean, Harry?"

"Just that, sir. In fifty-five of these speeches the word *neighbors* appears in exactly the same spot near the top of the first page. It's not a fraction of an inch different. If someone were to lay a grill over the page—"

"Did you make a grill, Harry?" Rand asked. He was staring at the mimeographed pages as if he didn't quite believe them.

"I've started one, sir."

The grill was a simple sheet of thin cardboard with certain cut-out squares and spaces. When placed over a message it allowed only certain words to be read. The device had been introduced into secret writing by a Renaissance physician and mathematician named Jerome Cardan. Every student of codes and ciphers learned about perforated grills early in his studies, even though few were ever encountered these days outside the classroom. Without a grill identical with that used by the sender, it was next to impossible to determine the message.

"They're usually used with handwriting," Rand said, doubtful.

"I know, sir." Thorne's grill had only one perforation so far. "But this window shows the single word *neighbors* in each of fifty-five speeches. I figure that was the contact word, sir—to let them know a message followed. He probably wouldn't have messages in every speech. The rest of it's going to be tough to figure, of course, but I'm watching for words like *government* and *weapons* and *atomic*. Here in the fourth line might be a likely place for another perforation."

Rand had his jacket off and was reaching for the telephone.

"It'll take days to solve this problem by trial and error methods. I'm phoning data processing; we'll have to use computers for this job. And round up everyone in the place who's not working on a top-priority rush job—we'll need them."

"Now, sir?"

"At once, Harry! And phone Hastings. Get him out of bed if you have to. This damned thing was all his idea."

Rand was tired the following afternoon when they met Martin and Gretta Dime in their hotel room once more. He had been without sleep all night. Now Hastings was with him, carrying the collected

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speeches of Martin Dime in a bulging, black brief case.

"I'm glad to see you," Dime said. "Brought the brass this time, did you?" he added, with a nod toward Hastings. Gretta was by the window, staring down at Buckingham Palace five floors below.

"I'm afraid there's been some complication about your clearance," Rand began.

"What? You mean I still can't see the Prime Minister?"

"You understand how these things are."

"I only understand that nobody really wants to talk about peace."

Hastings cleared his throat. "Mr. Dime, peace has been an excuse for a good many things in its time. The theft of atomic secrets from the United States was said to have been motivated by a desire for peace."

"What are you driving at?" Dime demanded.

Rand unzipped the black brief case and pulled out the mimeographed sheets. "We've been going over your speeches, Mr. Dime—the eighty-nine you delivered in the eighteen-month period just before you moved to Moscow. One of the young fellows in my department caught it."

"Caught what?" The color was beginning to drain from Martin Dime's face.

"A perforated grill—a clever, almost foolproof message device that one rarely encounters in modern espionage work." Rand held up three pieces of cardboard which bore three or four small windows each. "The sender has one set of grills and the receiver has an identical set. Placed over the first three pages of your speeches like this . . . the grills yield some interesting results."

"What are you talking about, Rand?"

"We've been working around the clock ever since I left you last night, Mr. Dime," Rand told him. "Better than fourteen hours and we had to call in every available person from several other departments to help. Fifty-five of your speeches were suspect because each had the word *neighbors* in exactly the same place near the beginning. We took the shortest speech, which ran to only three pages, and we fed the words on each page into three computers —one page to each computer. The programming alone might have taken several days except that we had done a similar job some months back on a machine-encoded cipher and could use essentially the same program.

"Each computer took a little more than four hours to print out close to a million combinations of the words on each page. This is much faster than anyone can read, so we had to use more than thirty people to skim over the output looking for word combinations that made sense. We found a good many such combinations on the first page, but only a few made good sense

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when matched with the possible combinations on page two. And when we tried to fit these words to the possibles on page three, only one sensible sequence remained. Then we cut a grill for each page and tried them on the other fifty-four speeches."

"And what did you find?" Dime asked in a low voice.

"In thirty-one speeches the grills revealed a complete message. In twenty-four, the message was interrupted by a blank or an irrevelant word, but it still made a sensible, although shorter, message. The messages usually contained less than ten words. I'll read you a few. *Neighbors government budget allows jet production immediate. Successful test in April.* And another: *Neighbors atoms test success but America wants halt.* Here's an especially interesting one: *Neighbors Russian military secrets being leaked through Berlin agent.* Notice the grill holes often show only part of the word."

Martin Dime stared down at the speeches as Rand moved the grills from one page to another. Hastings stood up. "We're charging you with treason, Mr. Dime. The exact charge will be read to you later today, but in brief it states that on fifty-five separate occasions while you were chairman of the Dime Commission, you did transmit to enemy agents information vital to the security of this country—information concerning weapons development which had been brought out only during the Commission's closed hearings."

"No!" It was a scream torn from his lips, and the instant it was uttered, Martin Dime threw himself forward, knocking Rand down.

Gretta tried to stop him, but he was suddenly like a man possessed. He started for the door, saw that Hastings blocked the way, and darted back toward the window. Like a trapped animal he cried out something like *"Betrayed!"*—and plunged through the shattering glass as Rand's hand made a final futile grab at his belt.

They heard his scream all the way down, until his body hit the roof of a delivery truck on Birdcage Walk, five stories below. Then for a moment there was no sound in the room except Gretta's uncontrolled sobbing.

The afternoon dragged on as Hastings handled the details of the messy affair. Finally, in Rand's office toward dusk, Gretta Dime smoked a cigarette and stared out the window at the river. "He liked water," she said. "He always liked it. In Moscow we used to stroll along the banks of the Moskva by the hour."

"Yes," Rand said.

"I think I'll be going back there, when I can. There's nothing for me here any longer."

Rand lit one of his American cigarettes. He felt very tired and

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had the beginnings of a headache. It had been a long day. "There might be some delay about that," he said quietly.

"I suppose so," Gretta answered.

"He loved you very much, didn't he, Gretta?"

"Of course he did. Why do you ask?"

"When he yelled *betrayed,* he didn't mean he had betrayed his country, Gretta. He meant that *you* had betrayed him. He realized in an instant what it took me an entire day to grasp. And he couldn't go on living with the knowledge that his wife was a Russian agent. You did it, Gretta. From start to finish, only you could have done it."

He told Hastings about it later, after they'd taken her away. He was even more tired now, but a few more minutes wouldn't matter. "You see, Hastings, by its very nature a grill message must be written, not spoken. The concealed communication had to be in those mimeographed copies of the speeches as they were released to the press. And the grill message—demanding exact placement of certain words on the page—could only have been positioned by the person who actually *typed* the speeches. Not Martin Dime, but Martin Dime's secretary, Gretta."

"But how could she change the words in his speech?"

"She used a number of techniques. For one thing, the newspapers indicated that Dime often departed from his prepared text. Actually, Gretta was changing the prepared text before it was released. She paraphrased, juggled words, rearranged sentences, and skipped lines, all to work in her messages. It wasn't as difficult as it sounds. Remember, Dime's speeches would naturally contain the very words Gretta needed for the messages—words about government and weapons and foreign relations. It was just a matter of getting them into precisely the right spots, and she only had to do it three or four times on each of the first three pages of the speech. I noticed that a few times she put in a word that didn't belong in context; these would pass as mere typing errors."

"But surely Dime must have known what she was doing?"

Rand shook his head. "Not judging by his reaction this noon. He was deeply in love with her, remember. He worked from his original copies of the speeches and probably rarely saw the copies she sent to the press. If he did, she'd simply tell him she was improving it a bit, fixing the grammar or something. And as his secretary, she'd have access to the minutes of the Commission hearings—even if he didn't tell her about them every night."

"Who did she pass the messages to?"

"That was the clever part. They went to the official Russian press

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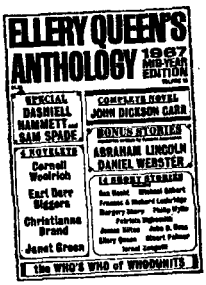
representatives in London, along with the rest of the press. It was a direct line to Moscow, without any of the dangers of a message drop or a conventional cipher. She probably never saw the man who received the messages."

"And then she got Dime to flee with her to Moscow."

Rand nodded. "But he wasn't interested in Communism, only in peace. When he insisted on returning to London, she simply had to come with him and hope for the best."

After Hastings had gone, Rand leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. Soon he slept, and dreamed about the river, winding its way to the distant sea where perhaps a sort of peace waited for men like Martin Dime . . .



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You've heard of computers making dates, matching the right girl with the right boy, and even arranging marriages calculated to be so perfect that we can look forward to the end of divorce and the propagation of a super race—at least, that's what we've been told. Well, in a mechanized world the computer may even become the ultimate weapon; at the very least it can certainly have dangerous unforeseen uses. For example, read what happened when Roger Winger, the boy-wonder advertising man with the nimble mind, hired the services of a computer at Data Examinations and Testing Headquarters . . .

QUID PRO QUO

by JOHN LUTZ

SURGICAL SHARP. THAT WAS THE phrase Roger Winger had coined to regain the Hall Razor Blade advertising account. And that was how Winger thought of his mind: surgical sharp, with the flexibility and spring of a fine stainless steel razor blade.

Now this man, he thought, as he looked across the desk at Radix, has an altogether different type of mind. Radix was obviously the relentless, plodding type, one who seldom erred, one who always stayed on safe ground.

Radix laid down the gold fountain pen with which he'd been laboriously writing and looked up at Winger through thick-rimmed glasses. "What type of girl would you like?" he asked.

Winger the boy wonder, Winger the nimble-minded, was thrown for a moment by the bluntness of the question, the irrelevence of it. Catlike, he regained his equilibrium. "A date isn't what I had in mind," he said, watching Radix's face closely.

Radix didn't look as puzzled as he should have. "But that's the service of Data Examinations and Testing Headquarters," he said, "to arrange perfect matches. Your personality data is fed into one of our computers and matched with data supplied by females with the same romantic inclinations."

Winger allowed his hawkish features to form a faint smile. "I know." He paused purposely. "It was Bert Donovan who referred me to you."

Winger was pleased to see that these words had a visible effect on the man behind the gleaming mahogany desk. Radix leaned back slightly in his chair and met Winger's eyes. He took in Winger's appearance—the well-cut gray suit,

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the sharp-features look of intelligence, the air of importance and confidence. Winger could almost see the man's mind working like the giant computers in the rooms behind him, sorting, evaluating, comparing.

Radix rose and shut a thick wooden door behind the already closed frosted glass door of the sparsely but expensively furnished office. He sat down again and frowned, hesitant about taking that first step onto uncertain ground. "Mr. Donovan told you exactly what?" he asked finally.

Winger decided to play along. "That for five thousand dollars Data Examinations and Testing Headquarters would perform its—alternate service."

"And did Mr. Donovan claim this service had been performed for him?"

"He did."

Radix thoughtfully adjusted his glasses with his forefinger, as if to bring Winger into sharper focus. "I can pick up the telephone and check this out with Mr. Donovan."

"How remarkable," Winger said. "Considering that Bert Donovan died of a heart attack two days after he told me about you."

Radix nodded slowly. "You understand, Mr. Winger, we usually solicit our own clients."

Winger nodded back. "But this time a client is making the initial move."

Radix leaned almost imperceptibly over the desk. "Suppose you make that move, Mr. Winger."

Casually, as if ordering in a restaurant, Winger said, "I want you to murder a Mr. Bradford Hart."

Radix reached into a desk drawer for a folded white form and laid it on the polished desk top. The gold fountain pen was poised. "Motive?"

"Professional jealousy," Winger said. "He was my partner in an advertising agency. Recently we dissolved the partnership so that Hart could start his own agency, and he took eighty per cent of the accounts with him. It isn't that he's that clever, he's just—"

Without looking up, Radix bid him be silent with an extended hand. "Please, Mr. Winger, that will be on another form."

Winger decided to be quiet, speaking only when Radix asked a question to fill out the white form.

When he was finished, Radix pushed the folded paper aside. "There is a human factor to be considered," he said. "What are the possibilities of you having a guilt complex after this is done? It's not uncommon, you know. Probably that was one of the factors that brought on Mr. Donovan's heart attack."

"Guilt?" Winger said thoughtfully. "Not much chance of that. I've done things much worse than murder."

Radix was obviously pleased by the answer. "Quite possible," he said, giving a series of affirmative little nods.

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Winger shifted his weight to one hip in the comfortable office chair and crossed his legs. Though he looked with disdain on an unimaginative mind like Radix's, he nevertheless realized that this type of intellect had certain merits. He congratulated himself on being clever enough to use people like Radix for his own purposes—just as people like Radix used computers for their purposes.

"Now," Radix said more enthusiastically, "I suppose Mr. Donovan told you about our unique but necessary payment plan."

"That's right," Winger said, "he did."

"I'll go over it to make sure." Radix placed his elbows on the desk top and rested one hand on top of the other, as if he were posing for a company photograph. "As you mentioned, the fee is five thousand dollars, paid in cash for our mutual protection. Did Mr. Donovan tell you about—"

"He told me that as part of my payment I would have to kill a man," Winger said. "Sort of quid pro quo."

"Splendid." Radix smiled for the first time. "I shall now explain to you just why this quid pro quo, as you call it, is necessary. You must understand our system. You will fill out a lengthy questionnaire about the intended victim, and also a questionnaire about yourself. We then research the intended victim, to make sure we know every aspect of his personal life, his daily habits and activities. When this is completed we feed the information on both you and the victim into a computer. With a speed you would find amazing, the computer sorts through these two categories—murder and victim. It matches you with the victim best suited to you; it matches the victim with the murderer best suited to him. Much in the same way that we arrange dates."

"Fascinating," Winger said. "And the risk?"

Radix smiled rather smugly. "That is the purpose of the computer," he explained patiently. "The element of risk is completely eliminated. For one thing, the all-important matter of motive is made nonexistent. And I assure you that the victim with whom you'll be matched can be handled with safety and expedience—for you, that is, because he will fit your own circumstances perfectly. You will be able to eliminate him with hardly a break in your routine."

"I suppose you want the money in advance?" Winger asked.

"Naturally," Radix said. He reached into a bottom drawer and handed Winger a thick sheaf of pink forms. "If you will just complete these—" he said pleasantly. "All records will be destroyed later, of course."

"For our mutual protection," Winger said. He took the forms to a small table in a corner of the office and set to work. The extensiveness

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of the required information astounded him. The most trivial things were listed. There were personal questions, business questions, and questions concerning daily routine—in fact, questions concerning everything imaginable.

Winger spent more than an hour hunched over the table filling out the questionnaires. When he was finished he handed them back to Radix and sat down again in the chair across the desk.

Radix examined the papers carefully. "Very good," he said, tapping the edges of the papers sharply on the desk to form a neat stack.

"There is one thing," Winger said. "How do I know I won't be suspected of Hart's death anyway? I mean, what if I don't happen to have a perfect alibi for the time his custom-made murderer is instructed to act?"

"No fear, Mr. Winger. The computer sees to it that there's no such problem. Perhaps it can even be arranged for Mr. Hart to be eliminated in another city. I see from the forms that he travels frequently." Again that smug smile. "We're a nation-wide organization, you know."

The thought sent a sudden, unexpected chill up Winger's spine. "So," he said, "I didn't know."

"Yes, indeed," Radix said, warming up to the subject. "And don't think it's only people as well off as yourself who retain us. There are plenty in the lower-income groups who consider it worthwhile to borrow five thousand dollars to rid themselves of someone. Of course *we* deal only in cash."

"You could hardly be expected to merchandize murder on an easy-credit plan," Winger said.

"Quite true," Radix agreed. "Now, Mr. Winger, to the business at hand. When we receive your five thousand dollars through the mail we will contact you."

"How?"

"Oh, nothing mysterious." Radix's voice was touched with patronizing amusement. "We'll merely phone you and tell you when to come here and receive the information you need about the victim with whom you've been paired."

"Very businesslike," Winger said. "I think I'm going to enjoy dealing with you."

Radix almost beamed. "That is the way we do business, Mr. Winger. The emotional factor is regarded as only that—a mere factor."

He rose, crossed the office, and opened the thick wooden door for Winger.

"A pleasure," he said cordially, as Winger followed.

"It's a pity you don't advertise," Winger said as he opened the frosted glass door and stepped out into the corridor.

Busy with the Hall Razor Blade account, Winger mailed the $5000 and pushed the matter to the back of his mind. Three days later Radix

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called, his matter-of-fact voice sounding even more mechanical over the phone. Again Winger had the reassuring feeling that this was not the type of person or organization to make a mistake.

"Could you drop by the office today about that matter we previously discussed?" Radix asked crisply.

"Certainly," Winger said, and at one o'clock he again was sitting across from Radix at the wide mahogany desk.

"Your victim is a Martin Kelly," Radix said. "You are familiar with the Garfield Building?"

Winger nodded. He walked past the Garfield Building every day on the way to the lot where he parked his car. It was an old building of small, rather shabby offices.

"The plan for you is simple," Radix said, "as are all our elimination plans. Usually we make our eliminations look like accidents, but sometimes an uncomplicated, untraceable murder is even safer. I tell you this because the death of your victim could be taken either way."

"Exactly what do I have to do?" Winger asked. He was surprised to feel a vague, delicious thrill at sitting here discussing a man's murder so calmly.

"Mr. Kelly," Radix said, "has a small business, Kelly Enterprises, on the third floor of the Garfield Building. Adjoining his office is a ten-by-ten room which has been converted into a safe and fitted with a steel door. Between 5:30 and 5:45, Mr. Kelly sits at a small desk in this safe-room and checks his receipts before locking them up. At 5:30 sharp tomorrow night you will walk into the Garfield Building, up the stairs to the third floor, and enter Kelly's office. The front door will be unlocked. There will be no one there except Kelly himself, and he will be in the safe. The open door of the safe is so situated that he won't see you enter, and the floor is carpeted so that he won't hear you walk across the office and shut the safe door. Even if you make some noise, the walls of the safe-room are steel-lined and he won't hear you until it's too late."

"And if he does?"

Radix shrugged. "You merely entered the wrong office." He looked down at his perforated cards as if to make sure he hadn't missed anything. "You will be wearing gloves, of course. It's mid-January, so that won't attract attention. When you are finished in Kelly's office you simply walk back down to the street, continue to the parking lot, get your car, and drive home. The whole thing shouldn't delay you more than five minutes."

"Sounds foolproof," Winger admitted.

Radix blinked his bland gray eyes. "It is as airtight as Mr. Kelly's safe."

It didn't seem that airtight the next day when Winger entered the Garfield Building. His hands were

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trembling violently, something they always did on the infrequent occasions when he was nervous. That reminded him to put on his gloves, which he did hastily; he then thrust his hands deep into his overcoat pockets and began to climb the littered stairs to the third floor.

It was just after business hours, and the building was almost deserted. Winger wondered if this was good or bad; on the one hand, few people would see him, but on the other, those who did might remember him.

He reached the third floor. Focusing his mind on what he had to do, he walked down the empty hall to the door lettered *Kelly Enterprises*. He swallowed once and quietly opened the door.

By George, it *was* easy! Exactly as Radix had said it would be. There was the open safe door on the other side of the office. There was the thick sound-deadening carpet. Winger had only to take a few silent steps and closed the door.

He never even saw Mr. Kelly. There was a startled "Hey!" that was cut off as the steel door clicked shut. The voice was not frightened, but it was edged with the hope that someone was playing a practical joke. Winger almost giggled, like a child who has successfully completed a difficult and involved prank. Then, with the tension gone, he walked out into the hall and back downstairs.

It was in the papers the next day —how Kelly had died of suffocation. Police speculated that the safe door had swung shut accidentally. Winger could imagine the horror that Kelly must have endured in the dark, soundproof safe. He hoped Bradford Hart's death would be at least as painful.

Now Winger had nothing to do but wait, and he didn't have to wait long. D.E.A.T.H. was indeed efficient. Four days after Kelly's death, Winger read in the paper that Bradford Hart had accidentally stepped into the empty shaft of an elevator that was being repaired in a Chicago office building. Oscar Reeso, the repairman, stated that he'd seen Hart approach the elevator doors, to which an *Out of Order* sign was affixed. Reeso saw Hart push the button and wait for the doors to open, but he didn't realize who Hart was. He thought he might be someone from the main office who had come to inspect the elevator. He realized he was wrong when the elevator doors opened and Hart stepped down thirteen floors.

The police didn't even question Winger.

Two weeks passed—completely uneventful so far as Hart's death was concerned. Winger was kept busy regaining most of the advertising accounts Hart had taken away from him. He'd already profited by Hart's death much more than the $5000 he'd paid to make it come to pass.

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There was only one thing about the murders that sometimes bothered Winger, sometimes pecked at the back of his mind. It didn't seem possible that a man could get away with murder so easily. It refuted everything he'd been conditioned to believe about such things. There were no records, of course, no proof of any kind that could expose Winger. Still there were nights when he lay in bed with his eyes open, checking and double-checking every move he'd made.

But eventually even this gnawing doubt disappeared, and Winger came to look on Hart's murder as just another successful business deal.

It was in Chicago, while sewing up the account Hart had been working on at the time of his death, that Winger happened to see the small item in a Chicago newspaper. The name registered instantly. Oscar Reeso, an elevator repairman, had been struck and killed by an unknown hit-and-run driver.

His fingers trembling slightly, Winger put the paper down and resolved to talk to Radix.

Radix was there behind the wide desk, as if he hadn't moved, and even the gold fountain pen was still gliding over the ever-present white form. Winger closed the door behind him a bit harder than necessary, to make a little reassuring noise. There was a young, efficient-looking blonde in the office, seated at a small table and typing on an electric portable.

Radix finished what he was writing and looked up. Something gleamed in his eyes for just an instant, then he blinked and it was gone. "Can I help you?"

Winger tossed the folded Chicago paper on the desk. "Read this."

Radix scanned the paper quickly, then looked up at Winger curiously. "About the United Nations?"

"About Oscar Reeso," Winger said tersely. He glanced significantly at the girl. "If we could be alone—"

"I really don't know what you're talking about," Radix said, "but surely anything you have to tell me can be said in front of Miss Kraft."

"You know damn well what I want to talk about, Radix."

"Now, see here, Mr. . . .?"

Winger took a deep breath and forced himself to be calm. "You know who I am, and you know I came here to talk about the death of Oscar Reeso."

Radix looked blankly at him. "I'm sorry, but I don't know you. Neither am I acquainted with the late Mr. Reeso."

Winger stood silently for a long moment, listening to the sound of his own breathing above the soft, steady cadence of the typewriter. "I'm willing to pay," he said finally.

Radix put on a convincing expression of puzzlement.

Seeing that expression, Winger knew it was useless. That's when

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anger welled up in him until his entire body trembled. Without realizing he'd moved, he was suddenly leaning over the desk and gripping Radix's lapels, pulling him to his feet. Through his rage he was surprised to see that Radix was a much smaller man than he'd appeared while sitting down. Winger shook him violently, feeling the unresisting body inside the well-tailored suit remain just stiff enough to maintain balance.

"Suppose I call the police!" Winger screamed the words hoarsely.

Radix looked at him with those hooded gray eyes. "The telephone is at your disposal."

Slowly Winger released Radix's lapels and glanced at Miss Kraft, who had stopped typing and was staring wide-eyed at him. He snatched the receiver off the phone and lifted it halfway to his ear. Radix had sat down and was now staring at him impassively.

There was a sudden, empty helplessness in the pit of Winger's stomach, and he slammed the receiver down. Defeated, he backed toward the door. He noticed Miss Kraft looking properly unconcerned again at her typewriter. "I'm willing to pay—" Winger's voice broke as he swallowed "—any amount."

Radix looked for a moment as if he were going to say something, then he merely shook his head.

In a daze Winger opened the door and stepped into the corridor.

He was still in a daze when he reached home. He let himself in and slumped onto the sofa. The interview with Radix had confirmed his suspicions. He understood now how Data Examinations and Testing Headquarters operated, how they neatly and coldly minimized the chances of anyone talking, of confiding in a friend, as Bert Donovan had confided in Winger. Once they received the $5000 and the client had performed his function as a murderer, he was promptly reclassified and fed back into the computer—as a victim. No doubt Kelly, the man Winger had killed, had at one time been a murderer.

Rising from the sofa, Winger walked to the small bar and poured himself a drink. Realization was bringing him out of his daze. He knew it could happen to him any place, any way, any time. As he returned to the sofa his hands were shaking so badly that some of the liquor spilled onto the rug. He understood now how Donovan might have had a heart attack—if it had been a real heart attack.

He sat trembling on the sofa and braced the vibrating glass against his knee, feeling the chill as some of the liquor sloshed onto his trousers. His frightened mind began to dart quickly about, frenziedly exploring the invisible walls of the trap in which he found himself.

But like a wasp flitting and darting against an impenetrable windowpane, Winger knew there was no escape.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The EQMM reader who, like me, sometimes finds EQ's introductions and notes even more interesting than the stories themselves will discover much to absorb him in WRITING DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY FICTION, edited by A. S. Burack (The Writer, $5.95). Here you will find, from many hands (including Howard Haycraft, John Creasey, Dorothy Sayers, Stanley Ellin and Miriam Allen deFord), a number of helpful insights into the history and nature of the crime-suspense story—along, I regret to say, with much that is trivial, outdated or uninformed. A mixed bag, but worth sorting out.

★★★★ **GIDEON'S WRATH, *by J. J. Marric*** (Harper & Row, $4.50)

Vandalism in London's churches is the chief theme of this latest multiplex procedural, which is, as usual, a model of the form.

★★★★ **PRISONER'S BASE, *by Celia Fremlin*** (Lippincott, $3.50)

Flatly, no one is better than Fremlin at introducing chill suspense into warm domesticity; this is another winner—and surprising funny along with its chills.

★★★★ **THE TOWER, *by P. M. Hubbard*** (Atheneum, $4.50)

Strange hidden life of an English village evokes dank creeps comparable to those of the best ghost stories—say, by M. R. James.

★★★★ **THE PASSENGER, *by Elizabeth Fenwick*** (Atheneum, $4.50)

Short, tight, subtle, tidy novel of youth coming of age, and of maturity on the borderline of madness.

★★★ **THE MAN WHO KILLED HIMSELF, *by Julian Symons*** (Harper & Row, $4.50)

Grand lively ironic story of double identity and murder, so well done that one condones a regrettably conventional ending.

Deadlines prevented my including, in last month's listing of the annual awards by Mystery Writers of America, two of special interest to EQMM readers: ceramic figures of Poe's Raven to EQMM and to both halves of EQ (Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee) to commemorate EQMM's 25th year (in 1966) of continuous publication, and to EQMM's managing editor, Clayton Rawson, for distinguished service to MWA.

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★★★ **THE COURTESY OF DEATH, *by Geoffrey Household*** (Atlantic-Little, Brown, $4.95)

Pursuit-adventure in which our hero is chased through Somerset caves by a cult of metaphysical animists; dry, factual, wholly convincing.

★★★ **IN PURSUIT OF EVIL, *by Hugh Mills*** (Lippincott, $3.95)

Gentle, brief and biting memoir of murder, with acute analysis of the evil in the ancient game of amateur detection.

★★★ **LIGHT CAVALRY ACTION, *by John Harris*** (Morrow, $4.95)

Fine solid courtroom-and-battlefield melodrama, in which a 1939 libel action brings out the truth about a 1919 Siberian cavalry charge.

★★★ **AN EXPENSIVE PLACE TO DIE, *by Len Deighton*** (Putnam's, $4.95)

Double and triple agenting in Paris, as sharp and exciting as all Deighton, and better plotted than most.

★★★ **THE CREEPING VICAR, *by Ian Hamilton*** (Lippincott, $4.50)

Second novel by a bright young Australian, who manages to give a straight action-whodunit plot to a good deal of the grotesque oddity of the New Humor.

★★★ **THE KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT, *by Charity Blackstock*** (Coward-McCann, $4.95)

Suspenseful romance of amateur anti-Nazi actions in 1938, richly evoking the evils of those days.

Baker Street Dept.: SHERLOCK HOLMES' GREATEST CASES (Watts, $7.95) is perfection: in its selection of stories (by consensus of the Baker Street Irregulars), in its introduction by Howard Haycraft, and above all in its superbly readable (if understandably expensive) large type. . . . THE LONELY HANSOM is a pleasing mimeo collection of 19 Sherlockian poems, from clerihew to ballade, which may be ordered for $1 from its editor, Chris Redmond, 178 Barrie St., Kingston, Ont.

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Meet Martin Copable, the suave and seemingly bored dilettante detective who is such a help to Scotland Yard, in the Case of the Invisible Silver Mink Coat . . .

MR. COPABLE, CRIMINOLOGIST

by AMY M. GRAINGERHALL

MR. MARTIN COPABLE WAS NORmally the most affable of men, but as one delay followed another he began to get impatient. He and his pretty companion, Monica Phonsey-Pritt, had been lunching pleasantly at a chic restaurant called Chantri's Centaur. When they finished their coffee, there was just time for Copable to take Monica to her appointment and to keep his own at Scotland Yard. And then he couldn't find his wallet.

"Absurd," he murmured. "Know I had it." He sat blinking foolishly behind his horn-rimmed glasses—not an unusual expression for him. However, his friends could have told you that the foolish look was usually deceptive, whereas at the moment he felt exactly the way he looked.

Then he brightened. "Got it," he said. "Know my—er—valet, Goggleminster Fain? Loyal chap, but a bit unpredictable. He rearranged my pockets this morning."

A careful search did indeed produce the missing wallet, but then they were held up by the weather. It had just started to rain, causing taxis to disappear. When one was flagged at last by the doorman, Monica created a final delay. She could not or would not go out in the rain until she had fished in her bag for an elusive envelope, containing a flower-patterned rainhat, which took quite some time to find. After carefully covering her expensive coiffure, she announced herself ready to challenge the elements.

Their taxi made its way through wet and slippery streets, and ultimately skidded around a corner, narrowly missing a van labeled Ruyland Laundry, then avoiding an omnibus and a stray pedestrian, and pulled up before ffothiette's, the exclusive furrier's, where Monica was due for a fitting.

Promising to return for her within the hour, Mr. Copable hurried off to Scotland Yard. He had told his good friend, Chief Detective Inspector Astolase Nautiss, that he would drop in about 2:30, and it was now almost 3:00.

Nautiss, however, didn't seem to notice the tardiness. "We're up against it, Martin," he complained in his dour way. "You've helped us before, and maybe you can now. It's this new wave of thefts."

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Copable nodded sympathetically. "The invisible goods. Valuables disappear from shops, and neither you nor the shopkeepers know how. The owners say the things couldn't have got out."

Nautiss nodded. "That's it. We're pretty sure who's doing it—Pat Fisher, working with his new wife, a smart-looking woman named Ovie. When we tail 'em nothing happens, and when we let 'em alone —wham, something else gets stolen. We have to catch them in the act or with the goods. Their latest haul was the Byram emeralds. See if *you* can figure out how they're doing it."

Copable studied the files, promised to give the matter his fullest attention, and departed to call for his lady friend.

As he arrived at ffothiette's, he was astonished to notice a most unffothiette-like commotion. Rowen, the present owner, was running in circles in an absolute frenzy of useless activity. His assistant was alternately trying to calm him and to peer into corners. Monica, forgotten, stood alone in the middle of the floor.

"Martin," she wailed when she saw him, "I'm *so* glad you've come. There was a mouse scampering around, and you know how frightened I am of mice! And they've lost a beastly coat and won't pay any attention to me! I told them you're very clever and you'd find it for them when you came." She glanced at the frantic furrier. "It doesn't seem to have comforted him much, does it?" she murmured. "But then he doesn't know how brilliant you really are."

Copable looked sharply for signs of sarcasm, found none visible, and turned his attention to the door, the scene of a fresh commotion.

Police were pouring through, Astolase Nautiss himself at their head. He clasped firmly by the elbow a tall chic woman clad in a graceful suit, who was volubly exuding indignation.

"I am *not* Ovie Fisher," she kept insisting with considerable hauteur. "My name is Loretta Case, as these gentlemen in the shop will tell you. I would be glad to assist the police, but I know nothing."

Nautiss gaped at Copable with an expression compounded of two parts suspicion and three parts disbelief. "The call came through right after you left me. How did you get here so fast?"

"Coincidence, my dear fellow," replied Copable, looking vacuous.

Only slightly mollified, Nautiss turned his attention to Mr. Rowen, who was still far too agitated to be fully coherent. He did manage to verify that the woman who called herself Loretta Case had been in shortly before, had tried on some furs, and had admired the astronomically priced silver mink which was now missing.

"But she did not buy it, or any other. She took no coat away with

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her. Oh, my beautiful mink, my masterpiece!"

Copable coughed. "Maybe you sent out another coat?" he offered helpfully. "And there was an unintentional substitution?"

But Rowen and his assistant, dithering though they appeared, were positive that no unauthorized coat had left their shop that day, and that no fur had been worn on departure that had not been worn on entering the exclusive shop. "We do watch, you know, with such valuable coats," Rowen said indignantly.

Inspector Nautiss turned the woman over to one of his men, and took Copable aside. "You see what that means," he said. "The coat's got to be in the shop. I'm convinced that woman took it. She must have hidden it here somewhere, and then she or Pat Fisher plan to get it away later—though I'm blessed if I see how that helps us.

"We found the woman window shopping farther down the block as we came along. How do you like that for cheek? Didn't even bother to leave the neighborhood. But she certainly had no coat on her when we saw her. And Rowen told me on the phone that the missing coat is a great, full, bulky one—so it must be here. We'll give this place a real going-over."

They set to work at once. They opened boxes awaiting delivery. They checked the storage rooms. They looked for coats inside coats; they even—ignoring her astonished protests—looked very carefully at Miss Phonsey-Pritt's own expensive coat which she had worn that day, to see if somehow it concealed a silver mink. They explored every nook and cranny of the store, while Mr. Copable looked on with interest, Monica with fascination, Mr. Rowen and his assistants with hopeless misery, and Miss Case with a bored indifference, or a well-feigned facsimile thereof.

"I know it's not here!" howled the wretched furrier. "Do you think I would have called the police if it had been here? Do you think I don't know my own coat, or all the places in the shop where it could be?"

At last Inspector Nautiss mopped his brow and declared himself baffled. He went back to the furrier and pressed for further details about Ovie's—or Loretta Case's—previous visit.

"She left just after this young lady came in. It was during the rain."

"I remember," Monica said helpfully. "She actually walked by me. Let me think now. Yes, positively. And I should certainly have noticed if she were wearing a silver mink coat. No, she had on a dark green raincoat—belted, with a sort of plush collar. But then that mouse! Ugh!"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Rowen said hurriedly. "I'm terribly sorry, my dear Miss Phonsey-Pritt. Such a thing

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has never happened at ffothiette's. But neither has such a theft!"

"All right," said Nautiss. "Now where are we? The silver mink coat was here. Mr. Rowen showed it to 'Miss Case.' She left and now the coat's gone. She didn't wear it out—everybody swears to that. Presumably she didn't carry it over her arm or behind her back?" That sarcastic query earned him nothing but withering looks. "Yes, but then *what?* I don't suppose she just folded it up and put it in her pocket, did she?" he asked, his sarcasm still dominant.

Copable gave a start, and for a moment there was a little less blankness in the pale blue eyes behind the horn rims. Then the vacant expression came back. "I say, Astolase," he murmured foolishly. "I think you've got it. Only the other way round, of course," he added firmly, as if that explained everything.

"Martin, what on earth?" Monica looked faintly embarrassed. "And after I told Mr. Rowen how clever you are!"

But Nautiss was looking at Copable with dawning comprehension.

"This time," he said jubilantly, "we *have* got them. Copable, my boy, you do have a good idea or two, I'm bound to admit."

Monica was turning from one man to the other, a plaintive and bewildered expression in her violet eyes.

"Will someone please explain to us mere morons?" she asked. "I don't like to appear stupid, but it really doesn't seem so clear to me—or to Mr. Rowen and his assistant. Just what did happen?"

"Don't you remember?" asked Copable. "What was the last thing that made us so late leaving the restaurant?"

"My rainhat, do you mean? What has that to do with it?"

"They make rain*coats* like that too, don't they? On the same principle? Carry 'em in your purse, and they take up hardly any room, nice and handy for unexpected rainstorms. Open 'em to a big, loose-fitting raincoat, to put over whatever you happen to be wearing when the squall starts—even a bulky fur coat. All Miss Case had to do was wait for rain—never a long wait in London—come in and try on the silver mink, and walk out in a raincoat under the unsuspecting noses of the shop people. I expect she dolled up the plastic raincoat a bit so that at a casual glance it didn't look like what it was, but more like a permanent coat. Had a belt and bit of a—what did you call it, my dear?—a plushy collar in her bag, no doubt.

"The mouse was part of it too. She let him loose, and while they were busy chasing him and appeasing Monica, she simply slipped on the raincoat, added the trimmings, and calmly walked out. They saw her leave in a raincoat and thought nothing of it. They keep a sharp eye

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out for *fur* coats leaving the shop, not for raincoats.

"That's all there is to the method, Astolase. Distraction and camouflage. Unexpected camouflage, of course, to escape your expert notice."

"Where's the silver mink now?" asked the Inspector. "Or doesn't your crystal ball show that much?"

"Trust Uncle Martin. When Miss Phonsey-Pritt and I first arrived, there was a laundry van around the corner. I daresay the other half of the team had charge of that. Miss Case, fur, and raincoat go into the van, Miss Case comes out alone, having deposited the stolen goods in a laundry bag, and she's clean. No reason she shouldn't do a little window shopping—most innocent-looking thing she can do—or maybe look over likely prospects for the next robbery."

"That's it," the Inspector was triumphant. "And her husband would have a system for passing the stuff on from the laundry van. Now that we know this much, we can trace the rest of it to them too."

But Ovie Fisher, alias Loretta Case, was new to the game and she was nervous. She gave herself away when she heard her tricks exposed. Mr. Copable had a final word for her.

"You should have stuck to your own name, you know. 'Loretta Case' is a dead giveaway. What name did you use when you stole the Byram emeralds? Esmerelda Frimbathy?"

EDITORS' NOTE: Once again Mrs. Norma Schier (the real name of the author of *Mr. Copable, Criminologist*) works her anagrammatic magic . . . In the last paragraph of the story Mr. Copable means, of course, that "Loretta Case" anagrams to "coat stealer"—just as "Esmerelda Frimbathy" anagrams to "Byram emeralds thief." (You have to hand it to Mr. Copable—he's an instant and expert anagrammatist!)

And by the same method:

Chatri's Centaur = chic restaurant
Monica Phonsey-Pritt (what a marvelous name!) = his pretty companion
ffothiette's (not a bad name either!) = site of theft
Pat Fisher & Ovie = pair of thieves

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Ruyland (the laundry van) = laundry
Rowen = owner

Mystery fans undoubtedly recognized the suave and seemingly bored dilettante detective:

Martin Copable = Albert Campion

and two other characters:

Astolase Nautiss = Stanislaus Oates
Gogglemunster Fain = Magersfontein Lugg

(These last two, Mrs. Schier tells us, gave her the toughest anagrammatic challenges in the series so far—finding anagrams in the spirit of the original names.)

And last but far from least, the "author"—Amy M. Graingerhall—anagrams (and what a beautiful anagram it is!) to the name of another great mystery writer whom Mrs. Schier highly admires and enjoys—the creator of Albert Campion and Others, the late and profoundly missed Margery Allingham.

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an Albert Campion story by

MARGERY ALLINGHAM

never before published in the United States

GENUS: **Detective Story**

SPECIES: **British**

VARIETY: **Charm — as only the British can do it**

THE CHOCOLATE DOG

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

THERE IS A TIME-HONORED THEory that the mysterious, the uncanny, the miraculous, or even the plain honest-to-goodness peculiar are all properly appreciated only in a half light.

Mr. Albert Campion, sitting on a lump of rock in the blaze of a pure white dawn, reflected on this belief and rejected it. He rubbed his eyes cautiously with his bathing towel—yet the man, the girl, and the dog did not disappear but remained in earnest consultation just below him on the dazzling sand.

They had not seen him, and since it is natural to prefer not to intrude oneself upon any sort of visual phenomenon, he remained perfectly still, his lean body melting into the pinkish crag behind him.

In all directions there was loneliness. There was not a sail or a ripple on the glassy water, not a parasol or a beach pajama on the sand, and in the near distance the planes and pinnacles of the discreet esplanade were as deserted as an empty plate.

The man and the dog sat facing one another, and the girl looked down at them. They were all creatures of that slight fantasy which is the most fantastic of all—the not *quite* right.

The girl was perhaps the most nearly normal, although sheer female beauty of the idealistic kind is still unusual enough to be surprising; and as she stood with her weight on one hip and the dawn light turning her hair to white fire, she was quite sufficiently miraculous to take any ordinary man's breath away.

The man and the dog were more definitely unlikely. They were both so astonishingly formal. The man

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sat on a flat stone in much the same attitude and costume in which he might have presided at a board meeting. He was a smooth elderly person, meticulously shaved and clad in pearl-gray suiting and spats. A ring glistened on his little finger and an eyeglass dangled from his neck.

The dog sat on the sand and he sat as anyone else might sit, with his legs stretched out in front of him, his solid four-inch tail, supporting much of his weight like the flap at the back of a photograph frame, being his only curtsey to dog construction. He was smooth-haired and chocolate-colored, with the lines and contours of a miniature carthorse, and he sat and surveyed the sea behind his friend with the thoughtful, contemplative air of one who rests.

Far up over the cliffs behind Mr. Campion a cock crowed and the girl straightened herself.

"It's getting late," she said unreasonably.

"Yes," said the man regretfully. "How do you feel about it, Theobald?"

The dog turned his head slowly, as though loath to take his eyes from the shining water. He sighed, an exaggerated gesture, and got up with dignity. He stretched himself carefully, each leg separately as dogs do, and then, before Mr. Campion's startled eyes, went through a further process of limbering up which dogs as a rule do not.

He raised his left paw and let it dangle alarmingly, as though the bone were actually broken, repeated the exercise with his right, dragged his left back leg behind him limply, and afterward did the same thing again with his right back leg. He hung his head until his nose was buried in the sand, rolled over on his side with his eyes turned up, and finally, having satisfied himself that every single part of him was in reliable working order, set off at a portly stroll scarcely faster than his companions, who walked after him quietly.

They passed out of sight at length, not with any haste nor yet with the dilatory luxury of those who stroll. They went purposefully, all three of them, as if such a promenade was part of their career.

Mr. Campion watched them go and afterward went back to his hotel feeling a little light-headed and uncomfortable. The tall houses of the watering place still had the blank eyes of sleepers and he felt like a trespasser in a dormitory.

He slept most of the day, as people who get up very early in the morning because they cannot sleep, sometimes do; and when he descended into the lounge of his hotel about cocktail time, the light over the sea was the familiar blue and gold, the esplanade was dotted with parasols, and the sands were alive with children of all ages and their colored toys.

The magical quality of the dawn had entirely disappeared and the

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world was once more a solid material place of ice-cream vendors, evening papers, and white-coated waiters carrying drinks on trays.

He remembered the vision of the morning with self-tolerant amusement and decided that the girl could not have been so beautiful, the old man so formal, nor the dog so—well, so businesslike.

This was his first real introduction to his hotel, at which he had arrived very late on the evening before; and as he sat in a corner tasting his sherry a misgiving nudged him. The wine was good and the room was charming but he began to regret the well-meaning friend who had recommended the place as the ideal retreat for three days of complete rest.

The annoying thing was, of course, that the hotel was *exactly* as the friend had described it—exclusive, quiet, and thoroughly English, with good food and superlative service; but Mr. Campion had forgotten the natural corollary of these attributes, which is, of course, the next best thing to the silence of the tomb.

Everybody was there, all the dear old familiar faces; the Colonel and his lady drinking in whispers in a corner; the elderly lady and her companion knitting with muted needles; the pleasant plump Mama with the two pretty twin daughters who looked away regretfully when the Colonel's young son glowered at them.

The Anglo-Indian widow was also there, languishing alone over an iced drink and a magazine; the two bachelors who did not know each other but who sat close together for protection; the hearty young woman and her girl friend who lowered their happy healthy voices the moment they laid aside their golf clubs in the hall and came to join the father of one of them dozing under a palm—these and several others, all exclusive, English, and perfectly quiet.

Mr. Campion was not a jolly person himself, but a long association with all sorts of people in the course of his profession, which was criminal investigation, had cured him of his native self-consciousness; and the presence of so many people who clearly all liked—or at least considered each other so much that they were prepared to become virtually dumb lest they offended or discommoded anyone else—got on his nerves.

It seemed to him that among people who had this one great quality of self-sacrificial politeness in common there must be other less Spartan grounds of compatability; yet he knew, as the others did, that one unguarded remark addressed to a stranger must produce the swift change of color, the guilty glance round, and the frigid commonplace which would add another layer to the ice.

It was actually while he was wondering if a great national disaster would break the barriers, or a nat-

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ural phenomenon such as pink snow shatter this stultifying delicacy, that the chocolate dog came limping in. He was in a most pathetic condition. His left forepaw hung helplessly and he dragged himself across the parquet on three faltering legs. In the center of the room he collapsed with a thud and turned up his eyes.

Immediately there was a general rustle and a scraping of chairs. Then the silence became absolute. The dog looked round him mutely, made a gallant attempt to sit up and beg, collapsed again, and howled very softly once.

"Poor chap, he's hurt." It was one of the golfing young women. But before her solid brogues could carry her across the floor, the Colonel had thrown down his paper, the elderly lady had cast aside her knitting, and the two bachelors had risen to their feet. The Anglo-Indian widow was the nearest and she got there first.

Five minutes later Mr. Campion himself joined the anxious throng. The dog was a little better. A committee of experts had examined his foot. The Colonel gave it on his word that no bone was broken. The father of the golfing girl, who had a pack of hounds, suspected rheumatism. The Anglo-Indian widow was inclined to agree with him. The plump Mama had persuaded the invalid to take a lump of sugar and the elder of the bachelors was holding the basin for her.

"A nice chap," said the Colonel's son to one of the pretty twins. "What is he?"

"Spaniel and labrador, first cross," submitted the younger bachelor.

"Terrier somewhere there," said the Colonel.

"Hound, I should say, sir," ventured the elderly lady, "with those ears."

"What's his name?" asked the prettier twin.

They tried them all and the dog was helpful. At "Jack" he looked blank, at "Jim" bewildered. "Rover" seemed to amuse him, "Smith" left him cold. But at "Henry" he barked.

"That's the name of a friend of his," said the Colonel. "Seen a dog do that before."

" 'Rumpelstiltskin'?" suggested the elderly lady's companion and everybody thought what a nice woman she was.

Mr. Campion forgot his superiority complex and cheated.

"Theobald?" he suggested.

The dog sat up and stared at him in astonished contempt. Never in all Mr. Campion's career had he met such a glance of withering disgust. A nark! The words were not uttered but they went home and Mr. Campion blushed.

"He doesn't like that, does he?" said the Colonel, laughing. "What is your name, boy? 'Rex'?"

The abashed Mr. Campion turned away from the crowd and came face to face with the girl of the morning.

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She really was beautiful, he was surprised to see, as beautiful as she had first appeared. She was looking at him reproachfully, a puzzled expression in her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he murmured.

"So you ought to be," she whispered and pushed through the crowd.

It took him all evening to get hold of her alone. The little hotel was like a parrot house. Since everybody now knew each other, it was only late arrivals who were not talking.

The Colonel, the elderly lady, her companion, and the elder bachelor played bridge in an alcove. The plump Mama and the Colonel's wife chatted happily about their children. The widow listened to the father of the golfing girls and those young women joined the twins, the spare bachelor, the Colonel's son, and a group of other young people.

Mr. Campion found the beautiful girl in the hall waiting for the elevator.

"You're not going up already?" he protested. "It's livening up now. Won't you join us all?"

She shook her head. "It's not in the contract."

Mr. Campion felt a little helpless.

"I'm so sorry about the name," he began, "but you see I saw you on the sands this morning with Theobald and your . . . ?"

"Father," she supplied.

"With your father," he repeated "I still don't understand, you know."

The beautiful girl laughed.

"Don't you? I thought you were a detective."

"So I am," he said desperately, for the elevator was descending. "That's one of the reasons for my disgusting curiosity. Look here, will you promise to give me an explanation tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow we shall be gone," she said and, stepping back into the elevator, was whirled up out of his sight . . .

But the following morning, when he was lying awake wrestling with a distinct sense of frustration and regret, he was roused by a discreet tapping rather low down on his door.

Theobald was in the corridor, fit and hearty as ever, with no trace of paw trouble. He cocked an eye at Campion, gave his tail a perfunctory wag, and dropped a small white card at his feet before he galloped off to the staircase.

Mr. Campion took up the pasteboard and found it to be a professional card neatly engraved.

Theobald and Co., it ran. *Introductions arranged. Hotel service a specialty.*

On the back, in a round clear handwriting, a single line had been penciled.

Primbeach next week.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 309th "first story" to be published in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . and an appealing "first story" it is. Consider its ingredients: TIME: *the Revolutionary War—1776, the year before the encampment at Valley Forge;* MAIN CHARACTER: *General George Washington—with the Father of His Country not only acting as commander-in-chief, planning the crossing of the Delaware and the battle of Trenton, but also acting as an Illustrious Detective;* THEME: *in the most contemporary manner—a spy story;* 'TEC TYPE: *the "locked room" . . . altogether, in locale, period, characters, and action, an interesting and entertaining story.*

The author, Steven Peters, is in his mid-thirties, married, and has three children. He was graduated from Colgate University and then got his doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Boston University. At the time he wrote his "first story" he was working as a child psychologist in a pediatric hospital in the Boston area.

His chief interests, after family and profession, are reading and rock hunting. He especially enjoys mysteries, and "especially those by John Dickson Carr and Ellery Queen." He also likes to read about archeology—"I think archeologists and detectives have a lot in common—in fact, the former are 'detectives of history'." Needless to say, we look forward to an archeologist-detective story in the near future . . .

GEORGE WASHINGTON, DETECTIVE

by STEVEN PETERS

OUR DREAMS OF A FREE AMERICAN nation are all but destroyed. We were fools to believe that an army of rabble could oppose the armed might of the Crown. It is hard to imagine, in this winter of 1776, how things can ever be worse. We are cold, hungry, and demoralized.

In the past six months we have been decisively defeated in the battles of Long Island and Harlem Heights. Just last month the loss of Fort Washington was the most bitter defeat of all. More than 2600 men were taken prisoner by the enemy. The remainder of General Washington's army, pursued by

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Cornwallis and his superior force of British and Hessians, were driven out of New Jersey and forced across the Delaware, into Pennsylvania. General Washington has established winter quarters in a farmhouse in Newtown, while the enemy has settled in Trenton, to await spring and the final campaign against us.

Our spirits are low and the men sense that final defeat is not far away. Many cowardly traitors are willing to sell us out for British gold and a Crown pardon. Only yesterday one of our patrols captured an American traitor, John Honeyman. This spy has been living under British protection in Trenton. General Washington ordered me to prepare a gallows for this morning. Unfortunately, a fire broke out in our camp last night and in the confusion the spy Honeyman escaped.

This morning, instead of hanging a spy, I received a summons to appear before General Washington. Always sensitive to our moods, he perceived my dismal spirits.

"Major Anderson," he said, "I know Honeyman's escape has depressed you, but I beg of you to put your mind to a task which I have for you. I want you to arrange for our staff officers to dine tonight at the quarters of General Greene."

"Very well, General," I replied, "but I don't think the staff are much in the mood for Christmas Eve festivities."

To my surprise the General laughed. "We are not celebrating the holiday, Major. We are meeting in a council of war to plan a venture whose countersign will be 'Victory or Death'."

I rose from my chair and saluted. "Yes, sir, I will see to it at once." As I turned to leave, the General spoke again.

"Major, one more thing. I expect the arrival sometime this afternoon of a Lieutenant Caldwell from Philadelphia. Please see that he is given a room at General Greene's and invited to the supper meeting."

"Very good, sir," I replied and left the room. I felt a vague stirring of excitement. *Victory or Death,* the General had said. Could it be that our ragged army was really going to fight? Then my spirits slumped again. The thought of our half-frozen army being a threat to anyone was almost ridiculous. Yet such was my faith in the General that I set about making the arrangements for the night with great energy and humming the old British march, *The World Turned Upside Down.*

It was late in the afternoon and snowing hard when Lieutenant Caldwell arrived. I had been so busy with the plans for the evening that I had forgotten about him. Through the window I saw him dismount from his horse, give instructions to a private for feeding the animal, and then turn toward the house. He entered the kitchen of the farmhouse that served as Ma-

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jor General Nathanael Greene's headquarters. He shook the snow from his clothes and saluted me.

"Lieutenant Caldwell reporting to see General Washington, sir."

I returned his salute and then shook his hand. "I am Major Anderson. The General is busy and won't be able to see you until this evening. He asked me to receive you."

"Thank you, Major," he said, as he slipped the cloak from around his shoulders. He was a handsome young man, about six feet tall. He wore a white wig and his freshly laundered uniform contrasted with our shabby uniforms.

"You are invited to dine with the General and his staff this evening," I said. "For a council of war."

"Oh," said Caldwell, lifting his head in interest. "Is there going to be some action at last?"

"I don't know. General Washington hasn't told me yet," I replied. "All I know is that the countersign will be 'Victory or Death'."

The Lieutenant paled noticeably. "That's very intriguing, Major," he said. As he spoke he swayed on his feet and I became alarmed that he would fall. I put out a hand to steady him but he waved it away.

"I was afraid I wouldn't be able to make it here today," Caldwell said. "I have just been released from the Army hospital in Philadelphia, perhaps a bit prematurely."

As I looked closely at him I thought he did look very pale.

"This storm and the snow made the journey difficult. I am well exhausted," the Lieutenant continued. "Could I be shown to my quarters and rest before supper?"

"Of course," I replied. I turned to call over my shoulder to a private in the front hall, who came on the double.

"Private, show Lieutenant Caldwell to his quarters."

I watched the two men disappear into the hall and then went back to my many preparations.

It was snowing heavily by the time we were ready for supper. The staff officers were gathering in the dining room as I went up the front stairs to Caldwell's room.

When I received no answer to my repeated knocks I tried the door and found it open. I entered just as Caldwell was raising himself slowly from his bed. He looked as if he had been deeply asleep and even more pale than when I had first seen him. I was about to say so, when he spoke first.

"I am sorry, Major, I didn't hear you knocking. I guess my journey was too much for me, so soon after the hospital."

"You don't look too well," I replied. "I came up to tell you that the staff are ready for supper."

"I don't feel too well, Major. I took some medicine the doctors gave me. It helps me to sleep, but it muddles my head for a bit afterwards. Perhaps if I could rest for another hour or so, I would be

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more fit to join the General after supper."

"Of course, Lieutenant. I will make your apologies to the General. Perhaps some hot rum—?"

He smiled weakly at me. "Thank you, no, Major. No alcohol. Doctor's orders." With a groan he sank back on his bedding. I left the room, closing the door quietly.

Supper that Christmas Eve was not exactly a pleasant affair. The staff were discouraged and silent. Conversation centered about the spy, Honeyman, and his escape the cil but little enthusiasm. We were day before. There was some listless speculation about the coming coun- waiting for the final course when there came a knock on the door. One of my sentries stood there, when I opened the door.

"Begging the Major's pardon," he said, "but there is a peddler in the kitchen seeking shelter from the storm. Shall I send him away?"

Before I could answer, General Washington, who had overheard us, spoke up.

"Bring the peddler here, soldier. I want to meet the man who travels on a night like this."

In a few moments the sentry returned, leading a rather tall man dressed in shabby clothes. A tattered cape was wrapped around him. A broad hat covered his head and was pulled low over his brow. Rags protected his face from the winter elements. Melting snow was all over him and he was shivering underneath his clothes. He spoke in a deep, rich voice.

"The soldier in the kitchen tells me this is the headquarters of General Greene. A poor patriot salutes you, gentlemen. I am Jonathan Weirs, a bookseller by trade."

General Washington rose from the table. "Good evening, Mr. Weirs. I am General Washington. Permit me to ask—what are you doing traveling on a night like this?"

The stranger turned toward the General. "I asked myself the same question, General. I expected to be safely in Philadelphia by this evening. I lost my way this afternoon in the storm. I was very much afraid it was the end of Jonathan Weirs, but Providence guided my horse to this farmhouse."

"You were lucky, patriot, to have been guided to us," replied the General.

"I beg of you, sir. Allow me to stay here this night. I cannot travel further in this storm. I can pay for my lodgings."

General Washington scanned the peddler's face intently before he replied. "Of course, patriot. As for pay, perhaps you can give us something more important than money."

The bookseller bowed slightly. "At your command, sir."

The General continued, "You travel through the countryside. I suppose your eyes see much?"

"Yes, General. My eyes have seen our ragged army."

The General hesitated a moment

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and then asked, "Have your eyes seen Trenton recently, patriot?"

"They have, General. The enemy reads too."

"Well answered, patriot. Perhaps you can tell us something of the enemy that will be of use to us."

In the poor light I strained to make out the man's features as he answered. "I can indeed, General, and gladly, if it will help our cause. But I beg of you. I am hungry, frozen through, and wearied. Perhaps some hot food, a bit of rum, and a few hours of rest? Then my tongue shall wag for you."

"Fair enough, bookseller," replied the General. He turned to me. "Major, see to our guest."

I nodded to the stranger. "If you will follow me, sir."

The bookseller bowed to General Washington once again. "You are most kind. I have taken the liberty of stabling my horse in the barn. I trust my knowledge will repay your hospitality." He followed me out of the room, where I turned him over to the sentry on duty.

I watched as they went up the stairs. Some instinct made me distrust this traveling bookman. Thoughtfully I turned and reentered the room where the General was waiting.

"What do you think of our guest, Major?"

"If he is what he claims, he could be of use to us. If he is a Tory spy, he could cause us much trouble."

"Do you have any reason to believe he is not what he claims to be?"

"No, sir," I answered.

"Well," said the General, "I don't think he can do us much harm tonight. We will see later what he knows about Trenton and how accurate his information is."

"But how will we know if he speaks the truth?" I asked.

In reply the General smiled. "I know more about the Hessians in Trenton than they give me credit for. Our cause has some very able spies, Major." With this cryptic remark he returned to the table.

When we had finished eating, General Washington arose and requested that we adjourn to the living room for our meeting. He leaned over to me and said, "If you will be so kind as to summon Caldwell now, Major."

I left the dining room and went up the front stairs. I saw a crack of light under the door of the bookman's room at the top of the stairs. I passed his door to the one beyond where I rapped sharply. This time Caldwell's reply came at once.

"I'll be right there. I am just putting my boots on."

In a moment the door opened and he joined me. His face now had a healthier flush to it and he looked remarkably improved. We went down the front stairs together and as soon as we entered the living room, the big double doors were closed behind us.

The room in which we were assembled was at the front of the

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house and served as General Greene's office. A large oak table was drawn up in front of the fireplace. Its top was covered with military maps. The room was dark and drafty in spite of the candles and the blazing fire on the hearth. The windows were tightly shuttered to keep out the bitter cold. I felt sorry for the men outside with only their campfires to warm them.

General Washington called us to order. "Gentlemen, the next forty-eight hours may well decide the fate of our country. Our army and the people need a victory to raise their morale. In fact," and here he smiled, "Congress demands we fight a battle in the next few days and win it—and we shall do so. I have decided to make a surprise attack on Trenton tomorrow night."

This announcement brought a murmur from all.

The General continued, "Tomorrow night, Christmas night, we will hold evening parade at six o'clock and then the men will be marched to McKonkey's Ferry. Colonel John Glover's regiment will be waiting at the boats to take us across the Delaware."

"My men and the boats will be ready, General." It was Glover who spoke. I turned to look at the man who had saved our army with his marine regiment of Massachusetts Bay Fishermen at Long Island. These courageous men had rescued Washington's trapped army by bringing it across the East River to New York City at night, leaving the bewildered British only an empty battlefield the next day.

Washington then went on to describe how three columns were to cross the Delaware—one above Trenton, another just below the town, a third below Burlington.

"Generals Greene, Sullivan, and I," Washington continued, "will take the main force of men and land ten miles above Trenton. General Ewing will take his men, land below the town, and take up a position south of Assunpink Creek to cut off retreat."

Washington now turned to Brigadier General Cadwalader. "John, your troops will land near Burlington. You are to engage the enemy and keep them occupied. Create as big a diversion as possible, but do not let them move to the defense of Trenton."

General Cadwalader nodded his assent. "Do I get artillery?"

"You do, John," the General replied.

Time moved swiftly as we were all caught up in the fever of discussing the attack plan. We stood now, in a circle, around the oak table, gesturing at and scanning the maps. Washington said, "The attack will commence at five in the morning. I have information from my spies that this should catch the Hessians by complete surprise. They will be up all Christmas night, drinking and celebrating. By morning they will be drunk and

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in no condition to put up a defense. If we catch them by surprise we'll have no trouble. If they are warned and get reinforcements, we'll have our backs to the Delaware and be wiped out. It is a big gamble, but I'm counting heavily on the element of surprise."

As the General was speaking I lifted my eyes to look across the table. There I saw Caldwell, standing stiffly erect, moisture beading his brow. For a moment I thought he had taken ill again. Then I perceived he seemed to be straining to listen to something above the noise of the conversation. Suddenly he turned from the table and bolted across the room, throwing wide the doors. We all stopped to stare at him in amazement.

He ran from the room and dashed up the stairs. We heard his voice cry, "Halt!" A door slammed upstairs. There was a moment's silence and then a shot was fired.

For a second we stood frozen and then I ran for the stairs. I took them two at a time, the others behind me. As I reached the top, the smell of burnt powder was strong in the air. I saw that the bookman's door was closed and no light showed underneath. I tried the handle; it was locked. I pounded on the door and shouted Caldwell's name. When there was no answer I pounded harder. "Bookman, open this door!" I yelled.

General Washington behind me ordered, "Break it in."

General Greene and I threw our weight against the door and as it burst open we tumbled inside. In the dim light from the lantern in the hall my eyes took in the empty room, its two windows tightly shuttered.

General Greene pushed past me around the bed and knelt on the floor. We rushed to join him and found him lifting the inert form of Caldwell. A pistol lay on the floor beside him, still smoking. The Lieutenant had been hidden from our first sight by the bed.

Eager hands pulled Caldwell to a sitting position and it was clear that he was not dead, only knocked unconscious. There was a bump on his forehead and his face was pale. Of the bookseller there was no trace.

I knelt beside Caldwell. "What happened?" I asked him.

"The bookman," he gasped. "He's a spy—was listening outside the door. I chased him in here, tried to seize him. He jumped me—we fought for the pistol—it went off. He got away—the back stairs. Quick, get him."

"Major," General Washington's voice cut through the air. "After him—he has gone for his horse."

I raced out of the room, down the back stairs, and out to the barn. The door was closed and I opened it with care. Pulling my pistol, I crouched low and stepped inside. The silence was overwhelming. Shadows danced threateningly

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everywhere. I worked my way to the stalls at the back which usually stand empty and called out, "Bookman, come out. You can't escape." My only answer was silence.

A lantern flashed at the door of the barn as help arrived. Soldiers poured in but they were not needed. The peddler's horse was gone and so was he. We searched outside the barn, but the wind and falling snow had covered all tracks.

I returned to the house crestfallen to report to General Washington. He and a shaken Caldwell were waiting in the kitchen.

"He is gone, General. The Hessians will know of our plans to attack Trenton. We can't attack now." In bitterness I turned on Caldwell. "You young fool! Trying to play hero. You let him escape." I think in my frustration and anger I would have hit him if the General hadn't stopped me.

"That will be enough, Major." He turned to Caldwell. "I want to talk to you. Come with me."

He led Caldwell back into the living room. "You gentlemen wait here," the General said, closing the doors.

We stood dejectedly, recounting what had happened. We all agreed that the spy's escape meant the end of our plans to attack Trenton. General Ewing pointed out that the spy might not be able to get through our lines to Trenton, but none of us believed it. Our hopes which had been so high a short time before were now extinguished. With those hopes, too, died the cause we were fighting for—a free country. We had been defeated by a spy even before we had had a chance to fight.

Nearly a half hour later the living-room doors opened. A grim-faced Caldwell strode by us and up the stairs. General Washington stood unsmiling in the doorway.

"Major," he snapped at me, "post a sentry before Lieutenant Caldwell's room. He is under house arrest for his part in this evening's affair."

I hurried to do as I had been ordered. Even through my anger I couldn't help feeling sorry for Caldwell.

I returned to the living room to find the staff with broad smiles on their faces.

"Ah, Major," said the General. "You missed the good news. We are attacking Trenton tomorrow night as planned."

I was aghast. "But, General, we don't stand a chance without surprise on our side."

"We will surprise them, Major. I promise they will not know what hit them until it is too late," the General replied.

"But the spy—" I protested.

"The spy," echoed the General. "Never mind the spy. He'll never get his news to the enemy."

As if to punctuate the General's words, a shot rang through the house. Once again we all dashed

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for the stairs. This time we met the sentry at the top.

"The prisoner has shot himself. He's dead, sir," he said to me. The General nodded as if he were not the least surprised by the news.

"He was disgraced," I heard myself saying. "It was better than a court-martial."

"Gentlemen," said General Washington, "forget the escaped spy and the suicide of Lieutenant Caldwell. We have much to do tonight. We attack Trenton tomorrow. 'Victory or Death'."

We followed him into the office, where we worked far into the night.

The attack on Trenton did not go as planned but it was still a grand success. I marched with General Washington, and am glad, for I was part of our great victory. Those with Generals Cadwalader and Ewing never did take part in the battle. Those men took one long look at the ice-choked Delaware and did not cross. But General Washington is of a different caliber. We made it through the sleet and fell upon Trenton in the early morning of the 26th, three hours later than planned. We killed 22 Hessians, wounded and captured 918, and 507 fled. If Ewing had crossed, we would have captured the 507 too. Colonel Rall, their commander, was killed. Only four of our men were wounded, and none of our men was killed in battle; however, two froze to death on the return march. It is surprising that more didn't freeze, since some of the men made the march in their bare feet. I am sure history will consider the Battle of Trenton the turning point in the struggle for Independence.

Three nights later General Washington and I were seated before a fire in his headquarters at Newtown, still removing the chill from our bodies from that long hard march. The General was drinking from a bottle of sherry which he generously shared with me.

"We certainly took the Hessians by surprise, General. But why hadn't Colonel Rall been warned? How could you be so sure the spy wouldn't get through to Rall?"

"Very simple, Major. I knew the spy could not warn Rall because he never left General Greene's house that night."

I stared. "What do you mean?"

"We were duped, and most cleverly. Go back, Major, to when I ordered you to the barn to stop the spy. Caldwell and I were left alone for a moment when the rest of you ran out. I helped him out the door to go downstairs. As we stepped past the shattered door, I suddenly remembered we had broken it in."

"That's right," I said, "it had been locked from the inside."

"Then, Major, how did the spy get out of that room?"

I thought for a moment. "The

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spy must have run out and then Caldwell locked the door. But that's absurd, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless Caldwell and the spy were confederates. Then by locking the door he would delay us and thus give the spy time to escape."

"Your version accounts for the door locked on the inside, Major, but it still does not tell you how I knew the spy had not left the house."

"Also," I added, "it makes Caldwell's actions of chasing the spy, shooting off the gun, and alerting us to the fact that we had a spy in our midst—it makes Caldwell's actions incredibly stupid. All he had to do once he had found out our plans was to leave the council, go straight to the bookman, pass on his information, and return to us. The bookman could then sneak out and we wouldn't miss him until much later. By then, even if we suspected he was a spy, it would be too late to catch him."

"Yes, that is a correct analysis," said the General. "Caldwell would not run such a senseless risk, and he was not a stupid man."

"But that leaves only one other possibility. Caldwell must have locked the door *before* the bookman left the room. That too is absurd, General."

Washington smiled at me. "Yet that is exactly what happened. What is absurd about it?"

"When we broke the door down, the bookman would also have been inside the room. But he wasn't."

"Oh, yes, he was," said the General. "You just did not see him."

I stared at the General as if he had lost his senses. Perhaps the long march with all its hardships had addled his brain. After some thought I said quietly, "I saw only Caldwell."

Washington roared with laughter. "Obviously, Major, from the expression on your face, if I did not outrank you, you would tell me I am crazy. I am not. Logic tells us that two people had to be inside that room. We found only one—Caldwell. Therefore, Caldwell and the bookman were one and the same."

Washington sipped his sherry. "You see, spying consists of two separate acts. Getting the information is often the easier part. Relaying that information to your own side where it can be used to advantage is often the harder part. Caldwell worked out an ingenious solution to the second part of his spying."

"I am not sure I understand."

"Some weeks ago," the General said, "I sent word to Philadelphia that I needed a man familiar with Trenton. Unfortunately my friends approached Caldwell. He was once a resident of Trenton, but unknown to my friends, he was a Tory traitor. He had orders from General Howe to attach himself to my staff, if possible, and send full

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reports of our winter activities."

"Which would make it easy for Howe to finish us off in the spring," I added.

"Yes," Washington agreed. "Caldwell leaped at the chance to get on my staff. The mention of Trenton made him suspect my plans. It is to his credit that he figured out that for such an attack to be successful, it had to be a complete surprise. This led him to his unique solution to the second and harder part of his spy task. He devised his plan before he left Philadelphia, to be used if his suspicions were confirmed."

"When he arrived I told him about the council of war. I even mentioned the countersign—'Victory or Death'."

"That must have convinced Caldwell that he had to act at once. He feigned illness as part of his plan. This left him free to slip out of his room through a window, drop to the snow, and appear at the kitchen door as the itinerant bookseller. His costume, in the dim light, was enough to disguise him. The only person who had seen him was you. The rest of us would only meet him later in the evening, after his masquerade."

"He fooled me," I replied. "I didn't trust that bookman, but I didn't know why."

"He even told us that he had stabled his horse, which as a peddler he did not have, to account for the horse's disappearance from the barn later during his supposed escape."

"Naturally, when I saw no horse in the barn, I assumed the bookman had ridden off on it, just as Caldwell planned," I said. "That was an ingenious plot, but how did it help him get the information to Rall?"

"That is exactly the point, Major. Rall did not have to get the information in order for it to be useful to him. As long as we thought our plans had been discovered and that a spy was on his way to Trenton, the attack would no longer be a surprise, and we were beaten."

I nodded. "And it almost worked. While you were talking with Caldwell, we all decided the attack would have to be abandoned."

Washington smiled. "During my private talk with Caldwell I told him what I had reasoned out. He confessed that I was correct and told me the full story as I have told it to you. I would have had him court-martialed immediately upon our return, and he would hang. That was why he shot himself."

"General," I said, finishing my sherry, "I feel better. We had two spies in our midst, but at least we caught one of them. Only one escaped."

"Wrong again, Major," the General said with a laugh. "I assume you are referring to John Honeyman as the spy who escaped. I'll let you in on a secret, Major. Honeyman is one of my best spies."

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Only on rare occasions in the 26 years of EQMM's uninterrupted publication have we included two stories by the same author in a single issue; but once again we are unable to resist the temptation. Before we could put Steven Peters' "first story" into print, Mr. Peters followed up "George Washington, Detective" with his second story, "The Backyard Dig"; and the two stories, written one directly after the other, are so different that they illustrate perfectly the unlimited range of interest and theme that a new writer can bring to the mystery genre. This criminological contrast, this potential of infinite variety, is one of the most fascinating aspects of the detective story—it always has been a quality to marvel at, and praise the Lord and pass the ammunition, it always will be!

THE BACKYARD DIG

by STEVEN PETERS

IT IS FRIGHTENING WHEN YOU think of it—how some innocent thing we do may have the most profound and unhappy effect on someone else's life. Like the time I picked a book on archeology off the public library shelf. I derived many hours of pleasure reading about the Incas, ancient Egypt, Easter Island, and other fascinating subjects. And naturally that book led to others and by then I had set in motion the events that were to change another person's life.

About this time we bought seven acres of land in a small town twenty miles west of Boston. We built a new house and I settled down to the commuter's life, going into Boston each day where I taught at a university—not history, as you might expect, but philosophy. My interest in archeology gradually narrowed to focus on New England and ultimately on my own backyard, quite literally.

Our seven acres contained some woodland, a meadow, a rocky area with a small cave, and a broad marsh that bordered on the Charles River. After much study of the natural features of the land I came to the conclusion that very possibly it contained an Indian site. There had been the river for travel and for drinking water; the rocks and the gentle plateau would have afforded protection against surprise attack; and the marsh had probably abounded in wild life, assuring plenty of food.

When I mentioned this to my wife, she thought it was pretty funny. I came in for a lot of good-

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natured kidding, including the suggestion that if I really wanted to dig I could spade up a garden area for her. But after a while she realized I was serious and took an interest in what I planned to do.

On a week-end a few days later I set out to do some digging. It was harder work than I had imagined and the land proved to be filled with stones of all sizes dropped in the area by a glacier thousands of years ago. For nearly a month all I had to show for my efforts were numerous blisters and a stiff back.

Then one day I found some unusual stones, about two to four inches in length, each with distinct side-notchings and a truncated base. Their surfaces were uneven, with many little ridges which I was sure were man-made. I cleaned the stones and was convinced I had found some projectile points, probably of an Archaic or Woodland culture. The museum at Harvard, where I sent the stones, confirmed my find.

It may not seem like much to you, but I was thrilled. My first find as an amateur archeologist! It was of interest, too, to the local paper. The following week's edition carried a front-page story with pictures of the points and of me. A rather lengthy article told about my interest in archeology and my plans for further digging in my backyard.

One evening, shortly after the article appeared, I was working at home when the front doorbell rang. My wife was out to a PTA meeting, so I answered it. I recognized my caller as Eric James, our neighbor down the road. He asked if he could come in and talk. Since I had finished preparing my lectures for the next week, I gladly invited him in. I fixed some drinks and we went into the den.

Eric was a good-looking man with graying hair, about fifty-five years old. He had been a widower for more than twenty years. According to neighborhood gossip, his wife had disappeared suddenly one day. For a time Eric was actually suspected of having murdered her. His house and grounds had been searched by the police, and the river dragged, but no body was ever found. Eric claimed she had deserted him and this view gradually prevailed.

Eric and I spent a pleasant two hours talking and I found him to be a well-read man with a keen interest in archeology. He had traveled extensively, living a leisurely life on money inherited from his wife's estate. He had been to many of the places I had only read about and I listened almost transfixed as he described his visits to Machu Picchu, the terraced city of the Incas, Chichen Itza in Yucatan, and the ancient Mayan city of Tikal.

Gradually the conversation turned to my own dig, and I showed him the points. Eric expressed interest and proposed, since he had lots of time on his hands, to

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keep me company as I dug. I accepted with delight, for seldom have I been so attracted to an older person. In spite of our twenty years' difference in ages, it seemed as if we had been close friends for years. Our interest in archeology provided a mutual bond.

Early the following morning Eric and I visited the spot where I had found the points. We spent a pleasant summer's morning digging further, but found nothing out of the ordinary. Eric picked up a rock which I identified as hematite, an important source of iron ore, but a common enough material. Since I was now hungry and the day was getting quite hot, we quit digging and returned to the house for lunch. The three of us ate and talked for some time and I could tell from my wife's reaction that she was equally captivated by our new friend.

Early the next day we went at it again. After a few hours of unrewarding work I began to lose interest in the site. I proposed to Eric that we try another location. He seemed willing, so we walked out of the woods and down to the foot of the rocky area where I had mapped out a promising site.

It was a low mound of rock and earth, and I confessed to Eric my conjecture that it might be an Indian burial mound. To my surprise he ridiculed the idea and said it was more than likely a natural formation. I admit I was probably letting my imagination run away with me. I really only half believed it actually was a burial mound. But I was a little annoyed at the sharpness of the ridicule. It was as if we had been playing a game and Eric had broken the rules by unexpectedly becoming realistic and serious. As a result I became a bit stubborn.

"How can you be sure it isn't a burial mound, Eric?" I asked.

"The Indians of the Northeast didn't particularly go in for burial mounds like this," he replied. "They used pits or shafts, and this doesn't resemble one at all."

"Perhaps," I said. "But it still looks like one to me. Why don't I dig for a while and then we can go to some other place?"

"It's not worth it," Eric replied. "That mound is probably filled with stones. You would break your back moving all those rocks. Why not try over there by those trees?"

"I'm going to dig here for a while," I said brusquely. "You can sit and watch if you want."

Eric sat down on a rock with a sigh. He pulled out his pipe, filled it, then lit up. "You're only wasting your time."

"It's my time," I snapped. I was sorry as soon as I said it. His reluctance about the mound had irritated me but I shouldn't have been so short with him.

Eric said nothing but continued to suck on his pipe as I dug. For about twenty minutes I moved rocks and dirt and then I noticed a small stone wedged in between two

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rocks. I reached down and picked it up. It was roughly rectangular, about four inches long, and flat on the side uppermost to me. But when I turned it over I saw two parallel, deeply worn grooves which ran completely across the width.

"Eric," I said, "look at this."

I passed the stone over to him. He turned it around in his hands, examining it closely. "Looks like an ordinary stone to me," he said, handing it back.

"I think it's a shaft abrader," I replied.

"You mean for rubbing arrow shafts smooth? I doubt it. It's probably the work of Mother Nature." Then he smiled at me. "You tend to let your imagination run away with you. I'm afraid you don't have the temperament of a scientific archeologist."

Now that last remark really rubbed me the wrong way. Maybe I do have a romantic imagination, but I was enjoying my digging, and my fantasies, if you want to call them that, were half the fun. Eric didn't have to trample on them.

"We'll see," I said. "After all, I did find those points. I'll send this off to the museum and see what they think."

Eric shrugged as I pocketed the find and bent to pick up the tools. "I'm tired. Let's call it a day," I said. We walked back in silence.

That night as my wife and I were getting ready for bed I told her about the difference of opinion I'd had with Eric. She said she thought I'd merely had my pride stepped on, and I guess I agreed with her. My anger with Eric had been childish and I resolved to try harder to be more agreeable the next day.

The following day was another beautiful, warm summer's day. Eric joined us for breakfast, and after we had finished I gathered my tools and we set out for the dig.

"Are you going to try a new site this morning?" Eric asked.

After a short pause, during which I remembered my resolution, I said evenly, "No—after finding that stone yesterday I thought it might be worth continuing to dig there."

"You certainly don't give up easily," Eric remarked, and I imagined a slight edge in his voice.

At the site of the dig I plunged in with renewed vigor. Eric sat off to one side, silently puffing on his pipe. It was very hard work and soon the sweat was rolling off my head and into my eyes. I rested frequently and chatted with Eric during these breaks. At first we talked about archeology, but then gradually out of my own curiosity I guided the conversation around to Eric himself. I soon sensed he was reluctant to talk about himself, as he gently but firmly turned aside my questions, giving me vague answers which told me little. Once I tactfully asked him about his wife.

"I don't like to talk about her," he replied. "She walked out on me, you know. It's hard for a man to ad-

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mit his wife found some other man more attractive." I felt guilty about probing and dropped the topic.

We stopped about noon to eat the lunch my wife had packed for us. As I was preparing to return to work, Eric complained that he was getting too much sun and suggested we quit for the day. I was tired and discouraged by the lack of progress and accepted his suggestion as a way of gracefully ending the tensions between us.

On the way back to the house Eric told me he had to be away the next day on business and couldn't keep me company while I dug.

"I'm feeling rather sore and stiff after today's work," I told him. "I'll probably take tomorrow off."

He seemed pleased that I would wait for him before resuming the dig.

The next day, after a good night's sleep, I changed my mind about digging alone. I returned to the site and set to work. In less than an hour I struck something that showed white. I went down on my hands and knees, carefully scraped away all the dirt, and lifted out a long bone, partially blackened at one end. I recognized it as a human leg bone. There were other bones, too, at the bottom of the hole.

I carefully removed them and laid them on the grass. They all showed signs of blackening, which I decided had come from an attempt having been made to burn them. Further digging uncovered an even more important find—a human skull. As I turned this over in my hands, I saw that the entire right side had been crushed in, leaving a gaping hole.

I was trembling with excitement. I was sure I had discovered an Indian skeleton, or at least part of one. I knew that some New England Indians had practiced cremation of their dead, which would account for the blackened condition of the bones. I piled the bones in the wheelbarrow and pushed it back to the house, calling out for my wife.

Her reaction was to screw up her face in disgust as I waved the skull in front of her. "There is a big piece missing out of it," she said.

"Yes," I replied, "this person was killed by having his skull crushed in. Just think, you may be looking at the remains of an Indian who died in battle, or even of a massacred white settler."

She gave a little shiver and looked at the woods behind her, as if she expected half-naked savages to burst out of them and scalp us both.

"Why don't you dig up potsherds like other archeologists?" was her definitive comment on the subject.

"You don't realize what a find this may be," I said. "Why, just think, Harvard archeologists at Jamestown, Rhode Island, found bones like this of Narragansett Indians who lived there over three hundred years ago. They also found remains of Stone Age people over three thousand years old. I am go-

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ing to send these bones to the museum and see if they can get a Carbon-14 date on them."

"Good," my wife said. "Do it today. I wouldn't care to have that thing in the house overnight."

I sent the bones that very afternoon.

Now you may think I am pretty naive not to have realized what was going on, but remember, I'm a philosopher, not a detective. Actually it wasn't until late that night that I got to thinking clearly. It wasn't very hard to imagine what the museum would report.

"The bones are those of a female Caucasian, about thirty-five years of age, who died from having her skull crushed with a heavy blunt instrument. The bones have been buried for about twenty years. We have notified the proper authorities that you have uncovered evidence of a homicide."

No wonder the police had found nothing when they searched Eric's house and grounds. He had killed his wife and buried her body on the property that was eventually to become mine. It was ironic that with all our seven acres I had to pick the very spot where he had buried her twenty years ago.

I said nothing to my wife about my conclusions, but they posed a problem for me. You may not understand this, but I still liked Eric, even if he was a murderer. I couldn't just let the police walk in unexpectedly and arrest him for murder. After all, it was my interest in archeology and my stubbornness in continuing the dig that had been his undoing.

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed only fair that I tell him what I had found. But being something of a coward, I decided it would be easier for me to tell him about the bones—but not about my conclusions. I would let him believe that I thought I had found an Indian skeleton. He could then do whatever his conscience dictated.

Consequently, early the next morning I called on Eric. He was just finishing breakfast and invited me to join him in a cup of coffee.

"This is unreal," I thought, "drinking coffee with a murderer and telling him you just dug up his wife's skeleton."

Taking a deep breath I said, "Eric, I dug some more yesterday and found some bones."

Eric paused in drinking his coffee and I swear his face went pale. "That's interesting," he said. I admired his self-control, though I thought his voice lacked enthusiasm. And he certainly wasn't making it easy for me.

"I found a skull that had been crushed in too," I added inanely.

"May I see it?" Eric asked.

I couldn't understand how Eric remained so calm. I was in a cold sweat. "I've taken them out of the grave," I said.

"You did what?" he exclaimed in horror. "I told you you'd never

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make a professional archeologist. You shouldn't have touched those bones! A professional archeologist could learn a lot from an undisturbed gravesite."

His reply confused me. If they were Indian bones, then of course he was right. I had trampled priceless history underfoot. The position of each bone should have been precisely recorded before removal.

But it wasn't an Indian. It was his murdered wife he was talking about. The conversation was certainly not going the way I had expected and I was beginning to feel I had made a very bad mistake.

"Where are the bones now?" Eric demanded. "Maybe we can give them a decent Christian burial in the Charles River and forget the whole thing. At least, we might salvage your archeological reputation."

My God! He was actually smiling at me as he spoke—smiling! Now I was really unnerved. Did he mean it, or was he poking fun at me?

"We can't," I managed to mumble. "I sent them off yesterday to the museum."

Eric looked startled. "You did what?" he asked.

"I sent them to the museum for identification."

"I see," he said thoughtfully.

By this time the sweat was pouring down my sides. I just wanted to get out of there. I felt as if I had made a complete idiot of myself. I muttered some excuse and hurried home to recover.

I didn't dare show my face to Eric again for the next two days. Did he suspect what I thought about him? What a shattering experience for both of us! I was sitting in my study, still shuddering, when the phone call came from the director of the museum. I only caught snatches of what he told me.

"Very important find," he said excitedly. "The bones are those of a male Indian—about two hundred and fifty to three hundred years old—would like to have a member of our staff examine the site . . ."

I hung up the phone in a daze. Detective, indeed! I was nothing but a damn fool and would do well to stick to philosophy. And was I glad I hadn't been more explicit in what I had said to Eric! He was no more a murderer than I was. Suddenly I felt I had to rush right over and tell Eric the good news.

I ran all the way to his house and rang the front doorbell, but received no answer. He was probably in the garden at the back of the house. As I walked around, I decided to check the garage first, to see if his car was in. Perhaps he wasn't even home.

I opened the doors to the garage and there was his car. There, too, was Eric, hanging from a rafter. Numbly I closed the doors and went home to call the police. There was going to be a lot more digging in my backyard before this was all over.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 310th "first story" to be published in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a story with, we think, a curious kind of "identity"—that is, we think many readers, both men and women, may "identify" with this story in an odd and perhaps a disturbing way . . .

The author, Patricia Ann Hollister, was 27 when she wrote "The Woman Who Couldn't Wear Red," and as she tersely described herself, she is a "wife, mother, and guardian of two dogs." She began writing in high school and won first prize in a short-story competition. "Having had this taste of glory" (again quoting from the author's letter), she has been writing ever since. "But time for writing," she reminded us, "has to be snatched from housework and from helping my husband in his butcher shop."

Butcher shop, eh? . . . Something tells us we'll be receiving more mystery stories from Patricia Ann Hollister now that we've bought her first one . . .

THE WOMAN WHO COULDN'T WEAR RED

by PATRICIA ANN HOLLISTER

THEY HAVE ALREADY ASKED ME why this madness came over me; now how can I tell you?

Madness, yes—for I loved him with all my heart, and he was a good man, and strong. The salt of the earth. So I must be mad.

Yes, I'll tell you everything. So far I haven't told anyone everything—perhaps the telling will help me decide why it happened. I'll start with our marriage, the beginning of our life together. My husband, Jim. Big Jim, they all called him; he was six foot three and weighed over two hundred pounds. But that was good, too, because I'm big—five foot ten—and until I met Jim I had thought no man would ever fit me. And we made a handsome couple. I'm very fair, with light red hair and the white skin of a redhead—as you can see, although you may not have thought my pallor was a usual thing. And he was dark, with a ruddy complexion and black hair.

We were married only two months ago—although I knew him

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for half a year before. They all said —all our friends—what a handsome couple we made.

And he was so good, and always right—our friends said, "No use arguing with Big Jim! He's always right"; and he was—he seemed to know just everything and I felt so safe with him. I could ask him anything and know the answer.

I'm stupid, you see, and he was always so patient with my foolishness.

He was kind to me, too—ever so kind. He helped me in so many ways; for example, he showed me that pink and red and yellow didn't really look good on me—not with my red hair, you know—and I had so many dresses that just weren't becoming at all. In my simple way I always bought the colors I liked—especially red—without even thinking how they looked on me!

So I gave away all those things and he, thoughtful man, bought me new dresses, mostly blue. The truth is, I hate blue dresses—I had to wear a blue uniform to school all my life—but of course blue does look so much better on me. He was right about that—and kind, too, to take the time to show me, don't you think?

Oh, he helped me in so many ways.

I didn't know how to cook—not very well, anyhow—when he married me, and he taught me how. Or I should say he tried to teach me, but I'm really so stupid—nothing ever turned out right. He showed me how to make spaghetti the way he liked it, the way Mrs. Batastini, his best friend's mother, makes it. But I could never make it come out the same way twice.

He was always so patient, though. He tried to help me and told me how to make it better the next time. He always ate it and said it was good—"But next time, Jane, put in a little more oregano; and simmer it longer, it needs to be thicker."

Or my bread. His mother always made her own bread, and I wanted to please him, he loved it so. But it always came out terrible—too salty or too sweet or too heavy or too light. I'm a very bad cook. And he tried to help: "Mom uses honey instead of sugar, Jane. Try it that way next time, huh?" He never lost his temper with me, like any other husband would—he was always so kind.

He had such fine taste, too—so much better than mine. I knitted him a sweater the Christmas before we were married. I knitted it in red. I like red. He complimented me on it. "You did a very good job on the knitting, Jane. What a shame you didn't think more about the color—I can't wear red, there's too much red already in my complexion." And I realized of course, how stupid of me, if I had only stopped to think; but he put it away very carefully and kept it because I had made it for him.

How many men would have been

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so patient and understanding?

Yesterday—it seems so long ago now. Only yesterday—

Excuse me. I was about to tell you. Yesterday was his birthday and I wanted to give him a new shirt. I went downtown to get it, and I was very careful—I had looked in his closet before I left, and I got him a shirt I knew he'd like because it was almost exactly like one he had, a brown and blue paisley print. I knew he'd like it.

While I was there, I saw a dress—a jumper, really—on a mannequin. It was red. I know, now, that I can't wear red—but this was such a lovely, vibrant color—like a sunset, or an American Beauty rose.

The most spectacular things in nature are red, aren't they? I think that's why I like red so much.

It wasn't a dressy dress, and it wasn't expensive—just a plain jersey jumper in this gorgeous shade of red. I couldn't resist it. See how foolish I am? I thought I could just wear it around the house, where no one would see me.

So I bought them both, the shirt and the dress, and took them home in one box. I had opened the box on the bed to wrap the shirt, and Big Jim came home from work early.

"Oh, Jim," I said, "you've come home too soon—I wanted to surprise you. Go ahead and look at your birthday present—do you like it?"

But he was looking at the dress. He picked it up in one hand and smiled, a sad smile—of course, considering how hard he'd tried to help me.

"Jane, won't you *ever* learn?" he asked, and he threw the dress on the floor.

That's when the madness came over me. I still can't tell you *why*—I just looked at that dress all crumpled on the floor and I lost my head. I reached into my knitting basket and took out my scissors and stuck them in his heart.

You know, he was right. Red didn't look good on him.

Well, he sighed and crumpled down on the floor like my dress, and I knew he was dead. It was so easy—and I don't know why I did it, and I was sorry, and I knew what had to be done.

So I went down and got a taxi to take me to the police station.

But first I changed into the red dress.

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THE TERROR RACKET

by The GORDONS

(*Continued from page 43*)

When Rip arrived at Kate's office, in answer to her call, she was gazing out of the window, down on the canyon below. She didn't suspect his presence until he said, "Hello, Mrs. Martel—"

She turned then, and he stopped suddenly, seeing her eyes.

"I have it here," she said, walking to the desk.

As he took the envelope, in the transparent cover he had supplied, he was conscious of the coldness of her fingers touching his.

"I expect to be lectured," she said. "I handled the letter. I couldn't help myself. I *had* to know."

He nodded in understanding. Her voice, he thought, was like her eyes, aged beyond her years.

"I'm to leave Vicki in the car," she said, "at the mercy of this—" She broke down, and he attempted to divert her thoughts. When she had recovered she asked, "What shall I do?"

He said, "I'm not permitted—well, the FBI can't assure the security of anyone in a situation like this. It's a decision you'll have to make. If you leave Vicki in the car, we'll do everything we possibly can to safeguard her."

She walked to the window. "If I don't go through with it, somehow he'll get to Vicki. You can't watch a child her age every minute—"

She was thinking it out for herself, thinking it out as she believed Bill might have.

"I'll be frank," she said. "I don't know how much more I can take. I tell myself I'm a fool—that that's what he wants. But it's something I can't fight. If Vicki was sick, I'd call a doctor, and I'd pray for help. If she died, I would have done everything I could. But this way, if I do one wrong thing—"

She sat down, picked up her purse, and took out a silver compact. "If there was any fighting, shooting, Vicki might be harmed."

He said, "There's another possibility. We could borrow a child-size manikin, wrap it up in a blanket. It will be dark."

Hope came into her face. She said doubtfully, "If he found out—"

"He would have to come to the car to know. We hope to take him."

She lighted a cigarette. She was calmer now. "If we use a manikin, he might see me leave the apartment, know I'd left Vicki with Mrs. Downes."

"He might. But if you're carrying something wrapped in a blanket—How big is Vicki? Can you carry her?"

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She hesitated. "Vicki'd be a load, but I could carry her if I had to. And at that time of night she'd be sleepy, and I'd have to. So, if I carry the manikin, it might look all right."

He said, "You needn't ask Mrs. Downes to stay with Vicki. I'll send a woman over from the office."

She searched his eyes. "No," she said slowly, "I wouldn't feel right about leaving Vicki with anyone else. She doesn't take to strangers. She'd be frightened."

"In these cases—" he began.

"Mr. Ripley," she said, "I trust Mrs. Downes as I would my sister."

He dropped the matter, thinking he would take the necessary precautions without her knowledge.

She let the cigarette smoke in the ashtray. "If he telephoned Mrs. Downes after I left—"

"You can tell her to disregard the phone, answer no one at the door, and turn out the lights."

"But what excuse can I give? She'll wonder—"

"Tell her it's something you can't explain now, but you will later. Ask her, as a favor to you, to do this—and to tell no one."

She took a long breath. "I'll be there at one o'clock tonight," she said slowly.

Rip consulted with supervisors and other agents about "covering" the extortion scene. After they had drafted an operational setup, he read the log reports. Surveillances had been run on 17 of Kate Martel's associates. Next he studied the memos from the agent who had "run the indices" at the Chicago Police Department.

The records disclosed that Uncle Max, under the name of M. Charles Martel, had been arrested, tried, and acquitted August 27, 1947, of bunco charges. The prosecution had sought to prove that Uncle Max had induced a man to invest $8000 in a factory which Uncle Max represented as a going concern, but which was "going" only in his head.

The records revealed, moreover, that Dave Millson had once been picked up for "breaking and entering," a charge dismissed two days later when he was released into the custody of his parents. He gave his age as 17. He was one of five who had burglarized a sports shop.

The police files held no information concerning either Emil Shurk or Mrs. Elizabeth Downes.

Such records, Rip knew, often signified little, especially a transgression committed in the teen years. Problem children didn't all turn out to be scoundrels; many had the pleasant habit of becoming respectable citizens. The records were valuable to him only as background to the investigation.

The credit records showed that Emil Shurk earned $86 a week, had no tangible assets besides his furniture and a car, and was labeled a

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good credit risk, although an appliance store had once sought to repossess a refrigerator.

Dave Millson, on the other hand, was termed a poor risk. A total of 17 small claims had been filed against him, including suits by two tailors, three florists, and a night club. His income from his realty and insurance business was reported by his bank as in the "middle bracket."

Rip sharpened a covey of pencils and got out a yellow legal-sized pad to jot down some salient points. He wrote:

Brenda Ralles telephoned FBI Office that she had information. Zack Stewart was killed when he went to talk with her. She staged fake suicide and was later found slain in alley in Cicero.

Only common denominator between slaying of Zack Stewart and Brenda Ralles: Jim Rainer, one-time gangster attorney, now corporation counsel.

Kate riffled idly through the pages of the latest news magazine. Across from her Mrs. Downes was dozing, her hands clasped across her ample waist. Occasionally she roused uneasily, like an old dog that senses something is afoot. Kate then would see her eyelids raise almost imperceptibly.

When the cuckoo announced it was 11:00, Kate slipped out of the room, carrying her shoes. In the bedroom her hands explored the inner depth of the closet and found the manikin. She placed it on the bed and wrapped it in an old blanket. She was appraising herself in the mirror when Mrs. Downes knocked.

"Child," she said, "Mr. Millson phoned, but I told him you were busy."

Kate nodded, wondering why Mrs. Downes hadn't called her to the phone. She hoped Dave wouldn't be offended.

Mrs. Downes startled her. "Child, when you come back tonight, would you call to me when you unlock the door? I might be a bit skittish."

Kate assured her she would. "It won't be until after two."

Mrs. Downes asked, "What time will Mr. Martel be coming?"

"Uncle Max doesn't get off until five. Don't you worry. I'll be back before then."

"I won't fret," Mrs. Downes said. "I take it as it comes."

Kate wished she could, but she was like a thoroughbred, born nervous. She was perspiring when she brushed Vicki's forehead with her lips. She straightened the twists out of Vicki's pajamas, and then, with quick decision, picked up the manikin and shoe box.

She was hurrying down the hallway on the first floor when she heard the alley door opening. Before she had time to step into a shadow, Emil was approaching her.

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"Why, Kate," he said, "what are you doing up so late?"

He noticed the bundle, and was instantly concerned. "Is Vicki ill?"

"No," she said. "I mean yes. I'm so upset. She has a fever and—I'm taking her to a doctor."

"I'll go with you," he offered.

"No, that won't be necessary, thanks."

She took a quick step past him and was out in the alley, which was dimly lighted by a single globe. She was in the car by the time he reached the door. He was calling, "Kate!" when she pressed the accelerator.

"I hope it isn't Emil," she thought. "Of course, it isn't. It's just that I suspect everyone."

The neighborhood proved to be one of modest residences on Chicago's northwestern rim. She pulled up under an elm, turned off the lights, and sat unable to move, her hands gripping the steering wheel.

She heard a dog bark far away; another dog answered him, and still another took up the conversation. Their neighborly chatter calmed her. She touched the manikin to assure herself it was sitting upright, and placed the shoe box at its feet.

She was opening the door when she heard a man's steps. Instantly she was rigid; with a hand on the door, one foot out, she struggled to still her breathing.

His footsteps stopped abruptly, not more than twelve feet away. She thought, "This is it."

He was coming toward the car, and then he looked in. He was an older man, and his face was an expressionless block in the dark. When he spoke, his voice had a rough edge. "Are you in trouble, miss?"

She strained to see if he was looking at the manikin. She answered, "I'm—I'm waiting for someone."

The man hesitated, then moved back into the blackness. His steps faded until she heard only the leaves whispering overhead.

She sat limp for a minute, then stepped out into the night. She stumbled once, and the noise was alarming. She turned right at the corner, walked four blocks north, then three east. She stopped a time or two, listening for footsteps trailing hers.

Walking, with the cool wind against her face, gave her hope. She knew now, all of a sudden, that this would be the night.

At a frame dwelling where a light burned behind a shade, she turned and walked up to a porch that ran the house's width. The door opened at her knock, and she walked in, to take a warm, friendly hand extended by a girl about her own age. "I was getting worried," she said.

"Yes, I know," Kate replied. "A man came along."

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The girl said, "I've coffee ready."

She walked toward the kitchen, and Kate followed. When the question had arisen where Kate was to spend this hour, Mr. Ripley had remembered an agent who lived less than a mile from Milliron and Wright. Other agents would make certain she wasn't followed.

The coffee warmed her, and the girl's easy chatter forced her to concentrate on matters other than the car parked at the dark corner. In the end, though, it was the consciousness of time that brought her back to the old tortuous paths of fear. Everywhere there were clocks, ticking away the minutes. There was her watch, too, which drew her eyes against her will.

Yet it was the girl who said, "It's ten to two, Mrs. Martel."

Kate thanked her profusely, gathered the wool stole about her shoulders, and hurried into the coolness of the night.

She hastened down the dark street, not caring now about the click of her high heels on the pavement. She found herself running. As she neared the corner she controlled herself and approached the car with forced composure.

She opened the car door, turned the lights on. She saw the shoe box where she had left it. The manikin had not been touched.

When the man paused by the car, Rip was lying prone behind a shrub 20 feet away. As the man resumed his course Rip whispered into the field telephone: "Man approaching your way. He stopped at car. Question him."

Rip lay there an hour, in the wet, cold grass. By the time he heard Kate returning, the dampness was in his bones. He heard the car door open, and he could imagine the numbness in her as she realized there would be other nights like this.

The next morning Washington was on the teletype with the results of the examination of the extortion note—the one fashioned by cutting letters out of a newspaper and pasting them on a sheet of plain white paper.

The message read: FINGERPRINTS NONE. LETTERS CUT FROM CHICAGO COURIER WITH NUMBER FORTY-SEVEN SCISSORS MENCKEN BRAND. EXAMINATION INDICATES SUBJECT PRONE TO CUT TOWARD LEFT. MUCILAGE USED IN GLUING LETTERS NUMBER TEN PHANTOM BRAND. SHEET OF PAPER IDENTIFIED AS WOODSTOCK AMBER BOND SOLD BOOKSTORES ONLY. ENVELOPE MATCHES. WOODSTOCK PEOPLE ADVISE H. Z. HARRINGTON COMPANY HANDLES FOR CHICAGO AREA. ANONYMOUS LETTER FILE SEARCHED WITH NEGATIVE RESULTS.

Rip handed the message to Barker, who read it slowly and said, "Maybe I'm stupid, but what's the anonymous letter file?"

"It takes time to catch on to all the files the Bureau keeps," Rip

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answered. "This one contains about seven thousand threatening letters. The Bureau makes a lot of identifications from it. People who write threatening letters are often repeaters."

Lieutenant Kuppel chose that moment to phone.

He had little news. Homicide had located Brenda Ralles's last boarding house, but had drawn a blank. She had spent five days there, stayed in her room except for meals, had no telephone calls and no visitors. She had used her mother's maiden name. The only assumption could be that someone had lured her from the boarding house by a ruse, and killed her elsewhere.

After he hung up, Rip asked Peg to inform Kate Martel he was on his way to her office.

Kate saw the deep concern in his eyes and attempted a smile. "I've hired the guard," she said. "Could the extortionist know I haven't drawn the money?"

"I checked with the bank. There have been no outside inquiries."

"I think I'll take Vicki away until school begins," she said. "I've got to get some rest. I've been taking sedatives but they don't work. The doctor says—"

He interrupted. "The man may be waiting for this. He may follow you. When the showdown comes, we're going to need anywhere from twenty to forty agents. We can't spare the manpower to send that many agents trailing you till then."

He carried authority and strength, and she liked it. She said tentatively, "I could phone you."

"It might be too late."

"I see," she said. She was pleased to give in to him. She felt a warmth in his talk that pushed the night farther back.

"I've something to confess," she said. "I didn't tell you before because—well, it didn't seem right."

She brought the skeletons of Uncle Max and Dave Millson out of their closets, and held nothing back. She told him of Dave's unwanted embrace; her fears about leaving Vicki alone with Uncle Max.

"It'll mean a violent quarrel," she said, "but I've decided to get Uncle Max out of the place. He's Bill's uncle; I haven't wanted to. But Emil Shurk says even Bill wouldn't want him there."

Rip asked her about Emil. She told him how Emil had advised her, and filled out her income tax return without charge.

"He's one of those wonderful men," she said, "who gets sneered at by his family and everyone because he can't make money. But Bill always said that surely pleasantness and kindness should have some reward."

It wasn't until later that she realized how many questions he had asked about Emil. When he was satisfied, he said, "I've a plan."

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"A plan?"

"I've a list here of seventeen people. I want you to invite three or four to dinner each night until you've had them all. Not more than four on any one evening."

She was puzzled, but it would be something to consume her thoughts and energy during the waiting.

"I don't want to explain," he continued. "If I did it might affect the way you act. I'll say this: I think we'll find the extortionist among these seventeen. If we don't—" He smiled. "If we don't, I guess you'll have to keep giving dinners until you've entertained everyone you know."

He reached for his hat, and said, "I'd like permission to make a transcription of the conversation at those dinners."

"Why, of course, but—" She stopped the question, and saw the gratitude on his face.

Kate circled the dinner table, arranging the silver, and then stood off, admiring the glassware that she and Bill had purchased piece by piece. This was the first night for "Operation Dinner." Mrs. Downes would cook and serve.

It was 6:50. Loosening her apron, Kate hurried to the bedroom to dress. The guests would be arriving at 7:30—Emil Shurk and his wife, and Dave Millson. Uncle Max would be present, too. While she pulled her black sheath dress over her head, she listened for the front doorbell.

When the Shurks arrived, she was pinning on the rhinestone cluster Bill had given her their second Christmas. Mady Shurk launched into the tiring day she had had, washing and ironing, and how her health couldn't take it much longer. Through it all, Emil sat blankly submissive.

Dave came, then, bringing a dozen roses from an expensive florist, Uncle Max put in an appearance, and Vicki turned up the television. They went in to dinner, Dave escorting Kate.

Vicky announced they were to have steaks. She said it as though it were an event comparable to the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers. Everyone laughed, except Uncle Max. He sat staring glumly at Dave.

Dave noticed, and felt constrained to say something. "Been catching any burglars, Grandpop?"

Uncle Max hooked a piece of bread with a fork. "Listen, I'm not your grandpop," he said tartly. "I'm praying the good Lord that Kate—"

"Uncle Max!"

At the sharpness of Kate's voice Mady Shurk looked up, eyes bright with interest.

Dave was amused, but said soberly, "I didn't mean anything by my remark, Mr. Martel."

"Of course, he didn't," Kate said.

Uncle Max glared. "There you go again, Katherine, sidin' against your old uncle."

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Emil, bless his heart, came to her rescue. "What do you think of that gangster getting away? Heard on television they had sixteen hundred officers out."

"Takes time," Dave said. "The FBI will get him. His picture's plastered everywhere. He couldn't even—"

"He's goofy even to try," Emil remarked.

Mady broke in, "Where'd you get the steaks, Kate?"

Kate told her, and how much she paid for them, which was what Mady was fishing for. Everyone agreed if prices kept going up, something would have to be done.

"Do you get that?" put in Dave. "Something will have to be done. I've heard that since I was a kid. But nothing ever is. With those screwy jerks we've got goofing off in Washington—"

Kate felt better. Washington was a good safe topic of discussion. The men especially could get a lot out of their systems by railing against that nebulous miscellany called Washington.

When Mrs. Downes brought the dessert, Kate suggested they light the candles.

Uncle Max grumbled. "A man can't see what's put before him."

"You haven't been poisoned yet," Kate said.

Emil lighted the candles.

Uncle Max was persistent. "There's more going on around here than meets the eye."

"How's that?" asked Dave.

Emil said quietly, "Kate, is there something—?"

"Of course not." She hoped she sounded jovial.

"Don't add up to two and two," Uncle Max said, "Katherine's givin' suppers every night this week."

Of all things she hadn't expected that to come out.

"I've obligations," she said. "I thought—"

"If I can help," offered Mady.

Emil sat quiet, thoughtful. In the candlelight his face looked more distinguished than Kate had ever seen it; it had a sculptured effect, but the deep-set lines had the harshness of concrete.

Dave, too, looked the worse for the softened light; it marked prominently the down curve to his lips.

Only Uncle Max, confound him, was flattered. He looked like the kindly old grandfather of tradition.

As she knew he would, Dave lingered behind. The Shurks were the first to leave, then Uncle Max. Dave sank comfortably onto the sofa to wait while she put Vicki to bed.

When she returned to the living room, she said, "Dave, I'm sorry, but I'm done in."

"Kate, I waited to ask you something," he said, rising. "You know that lake near Winona? I thought it'd be a wonderful spot for a honeymoon."

She thought he was joking. "Dave, you're not serious!"

"I am," he said soberly. "Please,

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Kate. I know how it is. I know I shouldn't say anything. But I'm too much in love with you to wait."

He was looking at her with an almost desperate intentness. "In time —you might—"

"No, Dave. It's sweet of you, but—"

"Is it always going to be *no?*"

"It's always going to be *no.*"

He picked up his hat. "Nothing like asking," he said dejectedly. "Well, good night, Kate."

Sleep wouldn't come. She lay thinking of Dave's proposal, and of Uncle Max's unexpected and perhaps damaging disclosure that she was giving a series of dinner parties.

She found her way in the dark to the living room. She remembered that the silver needed cleaning. If she could keep her hands busy—

The cuckoo reported that it was 2:00. Idly she glanced out of the window, across the well, and noticed the light still on in the Shurks' bedroom. Odd that they should be up so late.

She was standing three feet from the phone when it rang. Taking a deep breath, she moved to the little seat.

The man said without feeling. "You notified the police. They had the car surrounded."

"No," she said. "I had the money. Everything just as you wrote."

The man never raised his voice. "You called the police and you left your kid home. This time do as I say—or else."

"Please, whoever you are—I can't take this, I can't. If you want the money—"

"Listen, I'm giving you one last chance."

"I'll do anything. I've told you and told you, but you never meet me."

"This is it, and get it, period. Take the nine forty-two train to North Bend—"

"North Bend!"

"That's what I said. Stand on the rear platform and hold the kid by the hand. Have the money in twenty-dollar bills. Tie a flashlight to the package and turn the flashlight on. You get it?"

It was a second before she could answer. She heard him repeat harshly, "Have you got that?"

"Yes," she said.

"When you see two red lanterns swinging from a pole by the railroad tracks, throw the package on the tracks."

She asked, "When?"

"Don't get ahead of me. You watch those screwy personals in the *Chicago Courier*. You'll see an ad that says, 'Vicki sick. Please hurry home tonight. Harry.' Got it?"

"Yes, I understand. But North Bend. It's a long way. What if I miss the lanterns? Where will I see them?"

"Wouldn't you like to know? Wouldn't the police? Because they haven't enough men to stake out a

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hundred and thirty-two miles—if you do tell them. And if you do—"

Long after she had put the receiver back, she sat motionless. North Bend. First, a cemetery, and then a lonely street corner in the night, and now a train journey of more than a hundred miles.

She remembered, then, that she had forgotten to reach under the phone stand to throw the switch. The conversation had not been recorded. She didn't care; she was too stunned to care.

The extortionist knew she had betrayed him to the FBI. He knew she had left Vicki behind with Mrs. Downes. Perhaps he even knew she didn't have the money.

It came to her how dangerously stupid she had been. For a sum of money she had placed Vicki's life in jeopardy . . .

She knew only one person she could turn to, Emil.

He came in a frayed, faded robe. His watery eyes held the weariness of years. She was shocked for an instant by the refugee look about him.

"You have to forgive me for awakening you, Emil," she said, closing the door. "I need help, and I couldn't wait until morning."

He was pleased. "If I can do anything . . ." he murmured.

She began to talk rapidly. The story came easily, fairly gushing at times as her anguish sought escape. He listened attentively, occasionally nodding sympathetically. Once he said, "You poor girl." He was the same dear old Emil, ready to console her.

"Emil," she said, "I'm not going to tell the FBI about the train trip, and I'm going to pay the ten thousand. I don't know what the FBI will say."

In his patient, deliberate way he asked many questions, discussed various tangents, and reached the same conclusion. His soft, warm words seemed to set everything right, to carry assurance there was no cause for alarm, that the situation could be worked out.

"I don't know why you come to me, Kate," he said. "Your judgment's always right. You would have made a fine accountant. The way I see it, Kate, you have no choice. You can't watch Vicki every second. And if you cross this man up, he'll get to her some time. Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money, but Bill wouldn't want you to hold on to it."

"I know," she said.

"As for the FBI," he continued, "you can tell them after you've paid the money, and they can start looking, then. That's what they do in most cases—start looking after the crime has been committed. They don't catch a bank robber in the act, do they?"

She hadn't thought of it in that light. She was glad now she had forgotten to throw the switch under the telephone stand for this last phone call.

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The following morning the city crawled along under an unseasonable hot spell. Rip walked in on Kate unexpectedly at her office.

"I was passing by," he said, "and thought I would drop in." She gave him a quick glance that was unlike her, and he noticed.

"The party went very well," he said. His blue eyes rested gently on her, and stayed with her own.

"Did it?" she asked. "We didn't have any confessions."

"I wasn't expecting any."

She laughed. "Uncle Max tried to start something, but that's Uncle Max for you."

"Why would he be suspicious?"

She answered, "Dinners at our house are a break in the routine."

He continued standing, running his hand around the brim of his hat. "It's been several days," he said. "You should be getting more instructions soon."

Those blue eyes were still on her. Like Bill's the time she was sick and wouldn't admit it. She nodded.

A few days later Rip's world seemed comfortable and in place as he strolled into his office a minute or two before 8:30.

He was dictating when the call from the bank was put through at 10:05: Kate Martel had drawn $10,000 from her account in twenty-dollar bills.

He walked slowly the three blocks to her office. The fall day had lost its pleasurable feeling.

Kate was arranging her hair before a mirror that hung on the door of a wardrobe closet when he came in. She shut the door and came toward him, extending a hand.

"I'm glad you dropped in," she said; "I wondered if the dinner parties—I mean, have you learned anything?"

"I may know something this afternoon," he answered.

She took a call from the Deb Salon, third floor, and another from Display. Watching her, he saw the darkness of the skin under her eyes.

"I wanted to have a talk with you," he said, coming over to her desk.

"Yes?"

"You remember, I once said that extortion followed a pattern? The extortionist phones or sends a letter. He threatens the victim. He sets up dates he never keeps. He wears the victim down."

"Yes, I remember," she said. She was sitting in that ramrod way she had.

"The extortionist follows a pattern—and so does the victim. At some time or other the victim debates with himself whether he should work alone with the extortionist, or with the FBI and the police."

Her eyes dropped away from his.

He continued, "The victim has one problem when she deals alone with the extortionist: he won't keep his word. Let's take a hypothetical case. A young woman like your-

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self. She decides to pay the ten thousand without the FBI knowing."

Her face lost its color. She started to say something, but he hurried on, "This woman thinks that when she hands over the ten thousand, that ends it. She has no more money. But she's mistaken. She can borrow from relatives, her employers, her friends. So the extortionist, threatening death, asks for, say, three thousand more."

"May I say something?" she said.

"Of course."

"Maybe the extortionist is someone so close to this woman that he knows she has been talking with the FBI." She hesitated. "It isn't just catching a criminal, closing a case so the record looks good. It's saving her little girl's life."

He nodded. He said calmly, "The FBI's not a building of stone in Washington, and it's not a file filled with statistics. It's men and women who have Vickis of their own."

She had a handkerchief to her eyes.

He talked on, "The extortionist doesn't know this woman has been talking with the FBI. It's a shot in the dark. It's part of the pattern. He figures that maybe when he first called she ran to the police. If she did, he can scare her out of it, now that the time has come for the payoff."

His throat was suddenly dry. "She might look at it another way: somewhere other twisted minds are plotting this kind of crime. When they read about the capture of this man, they'll give up the idea. She's not doing it for herself alone. She's doing it for every mother, for every Vicki in this country."

He fell silent, and waited. She tucked the handkerchief back in her suit pocket, took a newspaper from the desk, and handed it to him. She already had circled the want ad: "Vicki sick. Please hurry home tonight. Harry."

By his clever plot the extortionist showed himself as having a cunning above the norm for criminals of his kind, and consequently his danger potential was greater than Rip had thought.

He had been too crafty to rely solely on terror to keep his secret. He had discovered, as every extortionist does, that while a murderer or thief may use surprise as a cover, the extortionist must notify his victim in advance, and hence, perhaps, the police. The extortionist himself pinpoints where the act of payment will take place. Usually, of course, he seeks to leave an escape gap in the trap he sets for himself.

Never before, though, had Rip known an extortionist to figure a corridor of operations 132 miles long.

Rip and Barker had an appointment for two o'clock with Dr. Robert Morin, the word detective. Previously they had handed him the

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transcript of the conversations at Kate's dinner parties, first eliminating the names and using alphabetical capitals, such as A, B, and C, to identify the speakers. They had given him, too, the conversations that Kate had had with the extortionist.

Dr. Morin was a professor of English and semantics at a local university. He arrived with two hefty brief cases, and proceeded to spread papers over several desks pushed together. When he had his papers arranged so that he could take the agents on a "guided tour," sheet by sheet, he struck into the subject matter.

"I don't know when I have enjoyed myself more. The extortionist gave himself away by using what James Fenimore Cooper termed 'an ambition of effects.' It's a disease quite prevalent in our era. Everybody wants to intensify what he's saying. He wants to hit it hard—to use a sports term."

He took a pencil from his pocket and pointed to the first sheet. "I'll come to the 'ambition of effects' in a moment. But first I want you to look at the breakdown in the conversations the victim had with the extortionist.

"I have only one conversation recorded verbatim, his second telephone call. He broke ninety-two words into fifteen sentences, or an average of six plus words to the sentence, an unusually low number. We must take into consideration that he was giving instructions, and, in doing so, everybody usually shortens his sentences.

"I have here the first conversation with the victim, as recalled by the victim. I think she remembered extremely well, because her account parallels the verbatim one to a remarkable degree. In this first conversation the extortionist spoke about ninety words, using twelve sentences, giving an average of seven plus to the sentence."

He walked to the next desk, talking rapidly. "We'll turn now to the three principal suspects, A, B, and C. It is to be noted that A spoke only nineteen hundred words at the dinner, while B used thirty-two hundred, and C, fifty-three hundred.

"The words per sentence for A averaged nine plus, while B averaged twelve plus, and C, seventeen minus. Hence, the breakdown of words for A is similar to the breakdown for the extortionist. A uses nine plus a sentence, and the extortionist, six and seven.

"As I said before, anyone's word count per sentence drops with the giving of commands, orders, and the like. I could continue showing you how A's word structure parallels the extortionist's in the phrasing and use of clauses, the cadence, the dropping of the subject, and the other facets, but let's get to the 'ambition of effects,' since it is more obvious.

"The extortionist enjoyed using intensifiers. In two of his conversa-

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tions, he employed the phrase 'or else.' He said, 'Wear something dark—or else.' He also had a fondness for using the word 'period' as an exclamation mark. He said, 'You have the money, period,' and '. . . get it, period.' These intensifiers become a habit. He says, 'You get it?' and 'Listen,' with variations, in every conversation."

Rip interrupted, "You mean these rather ordinary expressions can be considered as clues?"

"No, I didn't say that. None of the intensifiers or the habit expressions the extortionist used could be considered exclusively his property. But the point I do make is that when we find five or six such vulgarisms, then they become a pattern. It's unlikely that another individual would use the identical five or six."

He picked up the transcript of the complete dinner conversation and handed it to Rip. "I've underlined the intensifiers and the habit words the extortionist employed. Only A, whose average count per sentence was nine, in comparison with the extortionist's six or seven, used all of them. A is the extortionist."

They went through the motions of looking for A, although they knew their search would wind up on a dead-end street. He was already somewhere along his 132-mile corridor.

It didn't much matter. They couldn't have arrested him until they caught him in an "overt act." A jury would want more orthodox and substantial evidence than words alone.

The tension that night took on many characteristics: a word spoken too suddenly, someone sitting too rigidly, a voice raised slightly, but, more than anything else, the silence that replaced the small talk of ordinary hours.

No one mentioned Vicki, but she had her childish hand in everyone's. The simplest error of judgment, the slightest misunderstanding—they were something every agent thought about, and no one talked about.

The charts were diagrammed; the raid leaders led discussions; and questions were asked, debated, and resolved. With a restlessness unlike him, Rip would stroll to the window occasionally and look out.

He could see stars in a blue-black sky. The moon was only a quarter of itself, but that didn't matter. As long as the night was clear he could have confidence, but if clouds should drape the sky, or a fog roll in, then the danger would multiply a hundredfold.

When they all had gone, Rip alone remained behind. Barker was to keep a car motor running in the alley behind the office building. At zero hour Rip would join him.

It came to him how no one thinks much of time, until time threatens

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to run out. He realized what minutes had meant to Kate on those other nights.

At exactly 9:42, Peg signaled him from the switchboard.

"The train's pulling out," the voice said. "Everything's okay here."

Rip raised his hand to Peg. She was holding the line to the airport. She connected him.

Rip said, "The train's rolling."

The train labored its way through a labyrinth of streets, past scraggly houses with sagging porches and past low flat factories. When it had nosed into farm country, its Diesel horn honked like a flock of geese, and Kate felt the quick pickup in momentum.

She was standing on the observation platform, Vicki beside her, looking into a night that rushed away from them with a heavy gush of air.

Vicki said, "Mommy, you're hurting me," and tugged her hand.

Behind them an FBI agent was stretched on the floor with flare in hand. Farther behind, another squatted with a two-way radio, talking low into a mike.

Kate looked into the stars, faint and far away in a sky growing murky. She clutched the shoe box so tightly that her hand ached.

"I don't see the plane," she said.

The agent at the mike answered, "You will not see it. The pilot has blacked it out."

She was trembling, but more composed than earlier in the evening. Everything had happened. A horse had come in for Uncle Max, he said, paying 60 to 1, and he had taken the night off to celebrate with his cronies. Vicki had come home crying. And then Mady Shurk had burst in a little after 8:00, sobbing and hysterical, to report that Emil had not returned home.

Kate knew that Mr. Ripley had not approved of her telling Emil about the extortionist. But he had shown no anger. He had taken everything in his stride, and almost convinced her that the FBI could cope with a 132-mile trail of danger.

Still, she started every time a red signal light popped up. Two red lanterns . . .

Barker was driving, and Rip was on the two-way FM as the car smoothed out to a steady 45 miles an hour. The highway paralleled the railroad tracks a half mile away. Occasionally they could hear the wild-goose honk of the horn, coming eerily across the fields. Once, as the highway crossed the tracks, they stopped to let the train go by. They saw two lone figures, back-lighted.

Rip said, "Come in," and flipped over. The green pilot lamp turned blue.

The agent in the plane reported, "Fog coming in. We've had to drop a thousand feet. Train just passed Wellington station. Twenty-two minutes out now. Go ahead."

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Rip said, "Suggest you keep far enough behind the train so motor noise will not alarm subject."

Rip and Barker were traveling even with the train, as was another car on a parallel highway four miles to the east. Other cars were ahead of the train at points one half, one, and two miles. Instead of the 132-mile range of safety the extortionist thought he had, actually he would be working inside a rectangle four miles long and two wide.

Rip said to the agent in the plane, "Come in."

"Visibility poor and growing worse. Can follow train from this distance for another fifteen minutes, but then will have to quit or come in close. What do you advise?"

Rip said, "I'll let you know."

Fog. The one element they couldn't control, the one factor that could ruin their plans.

After Hanover, the train wound through heavily wooded land. It was almost as dark as a tunnel. Kate felt she could reach out and touch the trees.

Vicki was pulling at her hand. "Mommy, I'm scared."

"Just a few minutes more, hon," Kate said. "Do this for Mommy."

"Why?"

"Because we're playing games."

Vicki pointed at the agents. "They're tired. They're not playing."

It had been more than an hour, and now the train left the timbered country behind and raced through flat farmland. The speed shook the cars until Kate had to hold onto the metal gate for support. She swayed dizzily.

She was caught in a bonfire glow. The two lanterns whisked up and away. She cried, "The lanterns! I'm throwing the money."

The agent shouted, "Get down!"

She fell to the floor, dragging Vicki with her. The flares hissed as they left the coach.

The agent at the mike droned, "We're passing the sixty-one-mile marker. Package thrown between sixty and sixty and a half."

The speedometer needle was climbing when the plane radioed them. The voice had the impact of a Tommy gun. "First flares just went up. Approximately three miles north of Huntington Junction. A half mile east of the main highway."

Barker pulled off the concrete, waited tense seconds for a truck to pass, then swung back the way they had come. The night took on the reddish glow of a Fourth of July celebration.

Rip's finger found the location of the crossroads on the blown-up, five-mile-radius map.

The voice from the plane said, "We're coming in low to take a look."

Rip flipped over, and said, "Cars A and B proceed east on River Road. Cars C and F proceed east on

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Franklin. Cars G and H proceed west on River. Cars O and R proceed west on Franklin. All other cars set up roadblocks as planned."

Motorists were slowing down to watch the flares and to speculate. Barker turned on the siren.

The agent in the plane said, "We're circling low. Will call if we sight subject. Wait—we're being shot at. We're one half mile north of River Road, near tracks. We're going back up. Hold on. We've sighted car parked hundred yards south by east of water tower."

Barker slowed as he turned on River Road, but hit a wallow, and the car lurched out of control. He wrestled with the steering wheel, hit one chuckhole after another, and finally righted the car. After that he took the road at what seemed a crawl. The extortionist had chosen his ground well.

The plane, which had climbed back up into the darkness, leveled off over them again.

Rip said, "Come in."

The voice reported, "Subject is climbing into car. We're so close we can see the shoe box in his hand. He's looking up. We're past him. You take it."

Rip was having trouble with the squelch control. Hurriedly, he turned it until he had cleared the rushing sound, then said, "Subject sighted getting into car. Prepare to set up further roadblocks when signal given. Stand by."

As Barker whipped the car to the extreme left to miss another hole, Rip said, "He's got a country lane out of here."

This time the plane came in slowly over their heads.

Rip said, "Come in."

The voice resumed, "Subject's car proceeding west along trail parallel to River Road. About three hundred yards north of your car. Subject driving without lights."

The plane's wings flashed in the light of the flares. Over the radio phone Rip heard, "If Barker will turn north on country lane approximately four hundred yards ahead, you will meet subject where two roads cross. We'll follow car."

Barker gripped the steering wheel, pressed down firmly on the gas, and took the chuckholes as they came. Rip said into the mike, "Come in, X."

X was his reserve car on the main highway.

"X reporting in."

Rip said, "See if you can locate a country lane entering main highway between River and Franklin. If you do, set up a roadblock."

Barker swung into the turnoff at such speed he almost missed it. The plane came in again, "Subject still following trail west. You can intercept him if you hurry."

In seconds they reached the crossroads. Barker swung the car diagonally across dead center. Rip's door jammed, and he climbed over. Barker took a flare from the back seat and discharged it.

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They heard the motor bearing down on them, and ran. Metal hurled itself against metal as the oncoming car crashed into the Bureau one. The impact knocked the Bureau car across the road and into a ditch, where it tilted crazily.

Glass was still falling when Barker came up to the driver from the right and Rip from the left. The figure was draped motionless over the steering wheel. His head lolled grotesquely.

It was Dave Millson.

The snow fluttered listlessly on the flat, jumbled roofs of the Loop, casting a white sheen over the grime of summer. Rip watched it fall in the rainbow glow thrown up by the lights of the city.

He hadn't known Peg was about until she spoke. "Is this what the Bureau pays you for?" she asked. Her eyes had the look of a kitten having its ears rubbed.

He laughed. It was nearing midnight, and he was dog-tired. Before he could answer, she said, "I'm surprised the Bureau hasn't asked you to write a memo explaining why you smashed up that car."

"It may still," he said.

That was the Bureau for you. If a fender was dented, the Bureau wanted a memo. The Bureau has nearly 200,000,000 people watching out for their property.

She put the files he had requested before him. His conference with the United States Attorney was for 9:00 A.M., and he still had to brief the evidence.

Rip picked up the first statement they had taken from Dave Millson, the one given in the prison ward the morning following his capture. He had suffered a broken left arm, three cracked ribs, and a slight concussion. He had been neither taciturn nor belligerent. Only, his eyes had been strange. They had held a disbelief Rip had seen in those of a Nazi general taken prisoner. It couldn't happen to a superman.

That first statement admitted little. It said when he had read in the newspapers about Bill Martel being killed in Korea, he had thought what a "swell setup" it would be to marry "a good-looking dame and ten thousand dollars." As an excuse for meeting her, he made up the story about borrowing $30.

He said he had never contemplated extortion until she treated him "like a fiend or something" when he tried to kiss her. He denied knowing either Special Agent Zack Stewart or Brenda Ralles, and denied ever owning a weapon.

Next, Rip picked up the report that set forth the interviews conducted with Millson's acquaintances. They all told of his enthusiasm for guns, and recalled a three-fifty-seven magnum he had shown them.

Millson's second signed statement admitted to ownership of such a weapon, although he stated he had sold it "about ten months ago."

The chattering teletype had then

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closed in on Rip. Rip placed a copy of one message alongside the statements he would furnish the U.S.A. It was from the Lab, and concerned an examination of Millson's clothes. The report stated that a powder residue of paint, not evident to the eye, had been found on a coat sleeve, and might be identical with the powdered residue taken from the weathered paint on the apartment building window sill where Zack Stewart's murderer had leaned.

It was not conclusive evidence, but it was indicative.

Rip picked up Millson's third statement, the one given after they had told him of the Lab examination. The statement read: "I dropped into the Caranome Restaurant for dinner and saw this blonde, Brenda Ralles. We got to talking, and I dated her."

On their second date, the statement continued, they had gone on a round of night clubs; he had had a few too many drinks, became talkative, and told her about his plan to get $10,000 from Kate Martel.

The statement read: "The first thing I know, she's asking questions, and I'm answering them. Pretty soon I've told all. She was crazy over kids, and she didn't go for it. She thought it was horrible. Well, one thing led to another. We had a quarrel. I shoved her around some, and left."

The next day he began worrying about the matter. He dropped in at her apartment that night.

"Then I heard footsteps in the alley," the statement set forth. "I figured she'd got me into a trap. I knocked her down to shut her up. I ducked outside, and this big fellow comes toward me. I thought he'd seen me, and I fired."

He phoned her later, and threatened to kill her if she talked. When he'd read she had committed suicide, he had figured she was trying to get away from him.

The statement continued, "I knew as long as she was running around, she might talk. Sometime she'd get to thinking about kids. She'd call the cops. Sometime when she was in one of her down-in-the-dump moods.

"It wasn't hard to find her. I remembered her telling me she'd lived in Cicero when she first arrived in Chicago. I figured she'd go back to familiar landmarks."

Wearily, Rip gathered up the documents. He watched Peg as she walked to the water fountain. Suddenly he felt just fine. He remembered how Ginny Stewart, who planned to take that Bureau job in Washington like the soldier she was, had always liked Peg. "Why don't you ask the girl for a date?" she'd said. "What have you got to lose?"

He smiled as he rose from his desk and walked after Peg.

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a *NEW* story of crime and detection by
JULIAN SYMONS
first publication in the United States

George Mobley could already boast a successful career as a ladies' man —but that was only one of his talents. He was equally successful as an embezzler, a forger, and a con man who not only had a nose and eye for women and their weaknesses but also had a nose and eye for "the big break." He could smell and see an "opening," a "situation," an "angle," and he had the intelligence, coolness, and detachment to bring off every profitable coup that came his way.

When Genevieve Foster entered his life—the catlike, sensual, opulently attractive Gen—George Mobley realized at once that he had been handed the main chance of his life. This was "the big one" . . .

One of Julian Symons' serious studies of crime, with all the combined fascination of real-life-and-fiction . . .

THE MAIN CHANCE

by JULIAN SYMONS

MOST MEN, AND WOMEN TOO, base their lives more or less consciously on some system of ethics. It was the pride of George Mobley that he did nothing of the kind, that his life was ruled simply by his nose for women and his eye for the main chance.

"I can smell," he would say, "believe me, I can *smell* when a woman's ready for it"—and he had proved the truth of this by the number and variety of his conquests.

His eye for the main chance had also been demonstrated several times—in ways financially more satisfactory to him than to his partners—in, for instance, the small bookmaking firm for which he had acted as debt collector and in the insurance firm for which he had been a high-pressure salesman, and to the old gentleman who had employed George as his secretary and rashly permitted him access to a check book. George had put a percentage of the collected debts and the insurance premiums into his own pocket, and with only a little practice had been able to produce

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a very fair counterpart of the old gentleman's signature on a check.

Such activities meant, of course, that he could not stay in one place for very long, and George would have accepted (if he had known it) the philosophical idea that life itself implies movement, a constant flux. In fact, he had been running for six years—since he came out of Borstal in his late teens—and nobody had yet caught him . . .

Something about the tone of the advertisement in the Worthing paper caught George's eye. "Gentleman requires temporary part-time secretary (male) to help with topographical work." George was not short of money, since the affair of the old gentleman had been quite recently concluded; but he was at something of a loose end, and the advertisement had the air of not meaning quite what it said.

So it was one fine summer afternoon that George rang the bell of the Villa Majorca, a small Edwardian red-brick house standing on extensive grounds in the most solidly respectable part of staid West Worthing. It was his eye for the main chance that had led George to answer the advertisement, but as soon as he saw Genevieve Foster his nose came into play and told him that here was a peach so ripe that it would drop into his hand.

Not, of course, that he made any move at this first encounter. That would have been too crude, and a sense that there was something odd about the whole setup also moved him to caution. He had half expected that Mr. Eversley Foster would be an elderly bachelor, as susceptible to George's round-faced and rather consciously boyish charm as the old gentleman with the check book. At this first interview, however, he didn't see Foster at all; he was at Worthing Public Library where, his wife explained, he spent a good deal of time.

"Anyway, he left the interviewing to me," she explained. "He's such a fool about people. The last secretary he engaged could only type with two fingers. You *can* type, I suppose?"

George confirmed that he could both type and write shorthand. He answered her questions with the same briskness with which she asked them, but he was distracted by the way in which the boldness of her dark eyes and the opulent sensuality of her body seemed to contradict her businesslike manner. The opulence was of a kind now unfashionable, with distinct curves and thick, powerful thighs.

Genevieve was not exactly a beauty, but she had a catlike quality of sexual attraction that drew him like a magnet. When she asked for references he handed over almost absent-mindedly the letters he had typed on different machines and with different letter headings, and was shocked into attention when she tapped a letter purporting to be from Sir Chalmsley Baker of

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Redners Hall in Shropshire, and asked if he would mind if she followed it up.

George was not at a loss. "You can write, of course, but you won't get a reply for a week or two. Sir Chalmsley's yachting on the Riviera, lucky chap. He sent me a card."

"It's only a temporary job, after all." She tapped the letter again with a fingernail, and smiled. "Really the object is to keep my husband occupied. He's got a weak heart and can't do anything active. He just doesn't know what to do with his time. We won't bother with these."

In her smile as she handed back the letters he seemed to detect complicity, an unspoken compact made between them.

So it was arranged, and George went back satisfied to the small hotel in which he was staying. The work was only in the mornings for five days a week, and the money was neither here nor there. It was the promise held out plainly by Genevieve Foster, and in some unanalyzable way by the situation itself, that attracted him.

He presented himself as he was asked at precisely ten thirty on the following day, and began work. Foster was a surprise. From the way in which Gen (as he already called her in his mind) had talked, he had envisaged a retired Civil Servant, neat and finicky. After all, what other sort of person would be writing a topographical book because he had nothing else to do with his time?

But Foster was not like that at all. He was a small man of about 30, perhaps even a year or two younger than his wife, and of a weak Byronic handsomeness. He had black hair with a single white streak in it.

The two of them received him in the elegant drawing room, with its Victorian knickknacks in Battersea enamel and porcelain, and it was Gen who did most of the talking—reminding him more than ever of a cat ready to lap up any number of saucers of cream. Then he went with Foster into a little study on the ground floor.

"Are you interested in topography?" Foster asked abruptly.

"To be frank, I don't know the first thing about it." George added with his winning smile, "But I can learn."

"I took you on my wife's recommendation. She doesn't often make mistakes."

That more or less concluded their conversation. Foster then rattled off at considerable speed a variety of notes taken from the several large volumes on the table in front of him. They were all about the topography of West Sussex, and it seemed to George that the book must be in a fairly early stage of research.

When he was typing some of the notes he caught Foster looking at him in a way that was hard to de-

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fine. It was as though the man were—what? Afraid of him, jealous of him, assessing him as a rival? Something of all these, perhaps, with something else that George could not quite put his finger on.

At ten minutes to one Gen put her head round the study door and said, "Have you almost finished, Eversley?"

"For today, yes."

"You have time for a drink before you go, Mr. Mobley?"

They drank sherry in the drawing room, poured by Gen into small beautiful glasses, and it was she who showed him to the door.

"I'm sorry not to ask you to lunch, but we have only a very light midday meal. In the afternoon Eversley has to lie down. I told you that he's not very strong?"

Again as she opened the door there was that catlike smile, suggesting complicity in some delicious secret.

The next day, Wednesday, followed the pattern of Tuesday—the dictation, the typing, the glass of sherry. It appeared to George that Foster was reading selected passages from reference books, and he suggested that if they were suitably marked in advance he could copy them without the need for dictation. Foster rejected the idea.

"No, that wouldn't do, that wouldn't do at all." He went on to explain that he took pieces from all over the place, and that it was important for them to be typed in a certain order. George looked at the man and saw that his hands were shaking.

"I'm sorry," George said. "I just thought it would save time."

Foster mastered himself with an effort. He even laughed. "I hope I didn't sound rude. I've had secretaries before who've done things their way and got everything into a terrible muddle. Doing them like this may take a little longer, but at least I can make sure that everything is in the right order."

On Thursday morning Gen said, "Eversley's not here. He had to go up to London, to the British Museum, for some material he wanted. But he's left some things for you to type."

As he followed her into the house she said casually over her shoulder, "I'm making a cup of tea. Have one with me."

It was an opportunity, and one that might not recur. In the hall he put his arms round her from behind, holding the swelling breasts. Her body stayed taut for a moment, then she turned and her mouth was pressed to his. It was almost as though she were attacking him, and he was taken aback by her vehemence.

"Upstairs," she said in a whisper. "Upstairs."

He followed her into the bedroom, and here again she was a revelation to him. He had the sensation of being a passive rather than a dominant partner. The experience

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was strange to him, but he did not find it unpleasant.

Afterward, while they sat and smoked, he took in the luxury with which the bedroom was furnished —the silky Chinese carpet, the enormous bed, the obvious expensiveness of it all. Surely there must be something profitable here for George?

"I know what you're thinking," Gen said. "And I'll tell you the answer. Eversley's no good."

"I understand."

"Not in any way. He's no good to me, no good to himself. Eversley's stinking rich—that's why I married him. Oh, don't worry, he knows it, I told him. He still wanted to marry me. What I didn't know was that he'd get this heart trouble, and then that he'd want to molder away here."

Her tongue came out and licked her lips. "If *we* were married, you wouldn't want to work on a topographical history, would you?"

There was only one answer to that, and he made it. He said afterward, "Eversley's a fool."

She licked her lips again, with the curious gesture she had, like that of a cat washing itself. "The trouble is you haven't got any money. It's always the wrong people who have money."

He left her that day in a ferment of pleasure blended with some anxiety. He was conscious that for the first time in his life he had met a woman he might be prepared to regard as a partner, rather than as an object to be used.

On the following morning Foster was there again, and it was true that he had brought back some material from London, more books out of which he dictated passages. At half-past eleven, however, he said, "Can you get along on your own for the rest of the morning, Mobley? There are some details about dates of afforestation that I want to look up round at the library."

George intercepted a glance that momentarily startled him, because it appeared to be one of pure dislike. Then Foster smiled, and George thought that he must have been mistaken.

As soon as the front door closed he opened the door of the study and started up the stairs. Gen came down and took his hand. "Downstairs," she said. "We'll draw the curtains."

On the following Tuesday, Foster went to London again, and by the time George left the house that day he was, as he acknowledged to himself, her willing slave. He had to leave before lunchtime, because after lunch a woman came in to clean up the house, and it would never do, as Gen said with one of her sidelong glances, for old Sarah to find them in bed together.

In a sexual sense he was her slave, but he was still George Mobley; he still had an eye for the main chance, and he was convinced that

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Gen had her eye on the main chance too. He felt sure that she had a scheme in her mind about which she hesitated to speak to him, and he wanted to hear it. In the end, before leaving that day, he spoke of it himself.

"What's on your mind, Gen?"

She rolled over and looked at him. "Keeping you happy."

"Besides that. There is something, isn't there?"

"Clever." She licked her lips and said cautiously, "I told you Eversley was no good. He bores me. He's a fool."

"He's a fool," he echoed happily.

"And we suit each other. Don't we?" He placed a hand on her thigh. She said suddenly, "Those references. You forged them, didn't you?" She laughed at the look on his face. "I don't mind. I'd just like to know."

He said boldly, trusting her as he had trusted no one since he was a child, "Yes."

She moved off, as it seemed, at a tangent. "Eversley goes away on trips sometimes. On his own. For two or three weeks. He just wanders around."

"Yes," he said again. He couldn't grasp what she was driving at.

"He doesn't leave an address."

"You mean," he said uncertainly, "I'd be able to see you more often?"

"It doesn't matter." She got up and spoke almost coldly. "You'll have to go now."

By the end of the second week George was becoming restive. Any kind of work bored him, but this work was more boring than most, and at times it seemed to him that it bored Foster too. Sometimes he would be there, sometimes he would leave material for typing, although in his absence comparatively little was done.

One morning there was a shock for George—when the door was opened not by Gen but by a dragonish old woman with a mustache. Foster was not there that day, but Gen said coolly, "Sarah, this is Mr. Mobley, who is doing some secretarial work for my husband."

The mustached dragon nodded sourly, and for the whole of that morning he pounded away at the typewriter, without so much as seeing Gen. On the following day she explained that Sarah had come unexpectedly in the morning instead of in the afternoon. Any doubt he might have felt about the strength of her feelings for him was dispelled when she said suddenly, "Close your eyes."

He closed them obediently, and felt something pressed into his hand. She laughed at his expression.

"Open it. It's a present."

The gift was a pair of black cuff links, studded with what appeared to be diamonds, and a black tiepin. George took them to a jeweler and was told that they were diamonds set in an opal, and that the tiepin

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was a single opal. The jeweler valued them at £200, although he was prepared to buy them for only half that sum.

George did not sell, but the incident reminded him that it was time for him to turn his hand to another money-making venture. Did Gen, after all, simply want a lover? And a domesticated one at that?

One morning she interrupted Foster when he was in the middle of dictation by saying she wanted a nail hammered in the wall. She ignored her husband, and asked George if he would do it. He took the hammer she gave him, and knocked the nail into the wall, but he could not forbear asking why Foster had not done it. She whispered, with a faint giggle, "I told you he was useless, didn't I? He can't even hang a picture."

On that same day, when the three of them were having their glass of sherry before his departure, George looked at some photographs that stood on an occasional table near the window, and asked who they were.

"Aunt Edith and Uncle William," Gen said. "And that's a family group."

"And this one?" He pointed to a portrait of an elderly, erect figure, with a small mustache.

"That's a cousin of mine. His name's Mortimer Lands."

There was a silence that was somehow awkward. He looked at Foster and saw that the man had turned as white as milk. Why?

By the Friday of this second week George had made up his mind to have things out with Gen. It might be that his eye for the main chance had deceived him, and if so it was time to say a reluctant goodbye. If Foster was there in the morning he would insist that she came round to his hotel later in the day. This was something that she had persistently refused to do, just as she had warned him against coming anywhere near the house on a week-end.

But Foster was not there, and before he could deliver what he thought of as his ultimatum, Gen broke the news to him that the job was finished.

He goggled at her. "Finished? But all he's done is to make notes for the book."

"I know. I told you it was only a way of passing the time for him. He picks things up, then drops them. The truth is he doesn't like you, George." Her tongue came out, licked her lips. "I think he suspects."

"But this has happened before. You told me so yourself." And it was true that she had admitted taking other lovers. He felt almost angry.

"I know. Eversley's a strange man, George. When it happens—seriously, I mean—he goes away. He's going on Sunday."

"On Sunday!" He could not conceal his surprise. "Where to?"

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"I told you, he doesn't say. I'm lucky if I get a couple of post cards. He's talking about going abroad. He gives an affair like this time to burn itself out, as he calls it. Then he sends me a note to say he's coming back. Or I can go and join him if I want to. He's got the money, you see."

"Yes."

"Only this time it won't burn out. This time he doesn't have to come back."

He was surprised to find that his voice was hoarse. "What do you mean, Gen?"

"He doesn't have to go."

And then the whole idea came out in a rush. Eversley and Gen had a joint account at the bank, and she could draw on it up to the limit of the money he kept there—about £3000. Of course that wouldn't last very long. But supposing Eversley decided to settle abroad—in Argentina, say—and supposing that he had signed a letter asking for his securities to be transferred to a bank out there?

It would be quite easy out in Argentina, where nobody knew Eversley Foster, to copy his signature, draw on the securities, and live in comfort for a long time.

He did not want to tell her of his own skill in forgery. He said simply that it might be possible to deceive a bank in Argentina, but Foster's bank in England would be a much bigger problem.

"I've thought of that." She produced a sheet of their headed writing paper, blank, but with *Eversley Foster* signed at the bottom of it. "I asked him to sign it because I wanted to write to the telephone people about a new extension. We just type a letter to the bank, and there's his signature at the bottom. I told you, he's a fool."

"And in Argentina I'd be Eversley Foster?"

"Naturally," she said coolly. "You go out as yourself, then we get a forged passport to make you Eversley. It's not so difficult—it just needs money."

Then came the question that could no longer be evaded. What would happen to Eversley? George had no taste for violence.

"There won't be any violence."

He stared at her. "But then—"

"Eversley has a weak heart. I make him a nightcap every night. I've got some little capsules, and if I slip three of them in his drink he won't wake up."

She smiled at him, and he wondered if one of her lovers had been a doctor. "I won't need your help until afterwards, if that worries you. In disposing of him."

"Where?"

"The river, I think. I'd like to take him out to sea, but it's too difficult. Of course, he'll have to be properly weighted down. By the time he turns up, if he ever does, we shall be safe in Buenos Aires. And shall I tell you something?"

"What?"

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"There's no extradition treaty between Britain and Argentina."

Her coolness frightened him, and he wavered until she said that if he liked he could fly out to Buenos Aires first and wait for her. She would give him money for the flight.

"And what do I use to live on when I get there?"

She smiled. "You don't trust me much, George, do you?"

It was true. She was the perfect partner of his dreams, and in a way he wanted nothing more than to be with her, but he didn't trust her. He was rather proud of himself for not doing so—it showed that even when George Mobley met the most exciting woman he had known in his life he still retained his eye for the main chance.

He tried to say something of this to her, and she nodded. "I wouldn't want it any other way."

She agreed to draw £250 out of the bank and have it ready for him on Sunday. She already had the money for his plane fare to Buenos Aires, and she gave it to him.

"This one-way trust is all well and good. But you don't get the rest of the money unless you show me the air ticket."

Fortunately, George's passport was in order. He went up to London on Friday afternoon and bought the ticket. Then he returned to Worthing and spent Saturday and Sunday in a fever of expectation.

In order to avoid the temptation of going near the Villa Majorca he went to Brighton to pick up a girl. He picked one up on the pier easily enough, but after taking her dancing he ditched her—and this was not because there was anything wrong with the girl as such, it was because Genevieve Foster was in a class apart from the other women he had ever known, in a class by herself.

"She's got her hooks into you, Georgie boy, you'd better watch out," he said as he was having dinner at the Metropole and reflecting that very soon he would be rich like most of the people sitting round him, and would no longer feel like an interloper among them.

The thing that gave him more pleasure than anything else, he thought, as after drinking rather too much he returned to his hotel, was that he *had* watched out, that in the stress of passion George Mobley had still looked out for Number One. If risks were to be taken, it was Gen who would be taking them. Not the slightest concern for the fate of Eversley Foster ever touched him.

He walked up the quiet road on which the Villa Majorca stood at two minutes to ten on Sunday night. There was no light in the hall. Gen opened the door before he could ring the bell. Even in the darkness he could see that her face was unusually pale.

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"All right?" he whispered, and then he saw it on the floor of the hall. She had wrapped the body in a sheet so that it was completely covered, and had tied it round with rope.

They carried it through the house into the garage without a word. The trunk compartment of the car was large and Foster had been a small man, but they had to double up the legs to get him in. Or rather, she had to—it would have been beyond George.

Something occurred to him. "The weights?" he said.

"In the car already." She opened the garage and they drove away. After they were out of Worthing she went down roads that were unknown to him, stopping after about a quarter of an hour when she parked the car in a spot hidden among trees. He looked round, bewildered. She pointed to a hardly visible path.

"The river is through the wood, only a few yards. You can carry him."

The thought of contact with the horrible softness of the thing inside the sheet appalled him. He retched. "I don't know if I can."

Her face showed nothing of what she felt. "I'll carry him. You bring the weights."

That was what they did. The distance was no more than 30 yards to where a footbridge ran over a fast-flowing river. They attached the heavy weights at the head and feet.

"Now, this you will have to help with," she said. They lifted the sheet-encased thing together and dropped it. There was a splash, and it disappeared. She rubbed her hands as if she were washing them. "That's that. This sort of occasion doesn't suit you, does it, George?"

"I'm sorry." Now that the thing was gone, his confidence had returned. Back in the car he showed her the plane ticket, and said almost jauntily, "This is what you wanted to see."

"So it is." She took a packet out of her bag and handed it to him. "Twenty fives and the rest in ones. Nothing to stop you running out on me, is there, George?"

"You know I won't do that," he said, and meant it.

He took a train up to London that night, spent the night at a hotel, and was at London Airport in good time for the flight to Buenos Aires.

There the police, who had a watch on all airports, detained him.

How had the plan gone wrong? George could think of only one thing—that the body had floated to the surface. "You've found him, have you?" he asked.

The Detective-Inspector who was interrogating him said, "Don't kid me, son. We're talking about the murder of Mr. Foster. Eversley Foster."

They had not found the body? If so, there was still a chance. "I don't know what you mean."

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"And I don't know what *you* mean. Let's get this straight. You took a secretarial job with Mr. Foster, right?"

"Just for two weeks. It was finished."

"And then you're suddenly flying off to South America. Why?"

"It's a free country. You're even free to leave it if your passport's in order, so I'm told."

"Where did you get the money for the fare?"

"I saved it."

"And what about this?" The Inspector waved the bundle of notes. "Don't tell me you saved these because they're new notes, and we know Mr. Foster drew them out of the bank a couple of days ago." He gave them a final flip.

"*Mr.* Foster?"

"That's what I said. And what about these?—they belonged to him too."

He held up the black cuff links and tiepin. George felt as if he were in a room whose walls and ceiling were inexorably closing in on him, but he did not fully realize the deceit until the Inspector showed him the photograph of the man who had been found by Mrs. Foster on the drawing-room floor with his head battered in.

This was Eversley Foster, husband of Genevieve. He was the elderly, erect man with a mustache whose photograph George had seen on the occasional table in the drawing room.

Genevieve Foster made an excellent prosecution witness in the preliminary hearings. Sad, but composed and elegant, she told how her husband, who was a director of a large banking consortium and traveled up to London every weekday, had asked her to engage a temporary part-time secretary to type some material for the topographical history on which he was working.

Mobley, she said, had seemed a pleasant and well-spoken young man, and it was not until the second week of his employment, when she was going out with her husband in the evening, that he was unable to find his diamond and opal cuff links. She had been reluctant to believe that Mobley had stolen them, but her husband had insisted on a confrontation and had telephoned Mobley at his hotel, asking him to come round on Sunday night.

"Eversley didn't want me to be there," she said. "He liked to keep anything unpleasant from me. So I went out and had dinner with a cousin who lives just outside Haywards Heath. When I got back—" Her voice faltered, and the magistrate was sympathetic. "I rang the police at once."

Foster had been killed by several blows of a hammer, which was found beside the body. It was the hammer with which George had knocked the nail into the wall, and his fingerprints were still on it. The

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£250 had been drawn out by Foster because his wife had heavy cash expenses to meet in the following week, and it was the prosecution's claim that George had stolen the money after killing Foster.

Witherspoon, George's solicitor, abstained from cross-examination and reserved his defense. He was bewildered by his client's behavior, and was inclined to wonder at times whether George was mad. George told an extraordinary story about throwing a body into the Arun river, and asked that the river be dragged. When Witherspoon asked which body it was, George lapsed into gloom. "It was a dummy, of course. I should have realized it at the time."

Apart from this, George's only contribution to his own defense was a series of incoherent accusations about Mrs. Foster. At one point during the hearing he made violent signals to Witherspoon.

"Who's that?" George pointed a shaking finger at a man who sat among the witnesses, a weakly handsome, Byronic young man, with black hair in which there was one white streak.

"That is Mrs. Foster's cousin, Mr. Mortimer Lands."

Witherspoon read with exasperation the note George handed down, which said: *The two of them conspired to murder him. I don't know which one used the hammer.*

Witherspoon found himself disagreeing with the psychiatrists who certified that George was perfectly sane.

Three days before the trial itself began, tragedy struck. Mrs. Foster was driving her cousin Mr. Lands from London back to the coast when she took a curve much too fast, swerved to avoid a big truck that was directly in her path, lost control, and ran into a tree. Both driver and passenger were killed instantly.

The tragedy had little effect on George's trial. Mrs. Foster's evidence, previously given in the Magistrate's Court, was permitted to be read to the jury after a legal wrangle. But in any case there were substantial facts that did not depend on Mrs. Foster—the stolen cuff links and tiepin, the stolen money, the fingerprints on the hammer, and the flight to Argentina. The accused was never able to explain any of them satisfactorily, and he did his case no good at all by persisting in a defense which suggested that Mrs. Foster had been his partner in a pretended plot to kill her cousin, who had been represented to him as her husband.

The Judge in his summing up referred in scathing terms to this defense as one which deliberately blackened the name of a dead woman and for which there was absolutely no evidence beyond Mobley's unsupported word.

"It is for you to decide, ladies and gentlemen, what that word is

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worth," the Judge said, looking at the jury over his spectacles.

They decided within fifteen minutes. But the verdict of "Guilty," and even the sentence of life imprisonment, angered George less than one phrase used by the Judge in commenting on his story: "Counsel did not put Mobley before you as a very intelligent young man. You may agree with him, but listening to Mobley's own account of the charade which he says utterly deceived him, you may well ask yourselves: 'Can any man have been as big a fool as that?'."

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	DUE DATE
Black, Gavin	A WIND OF DEATH	Harper & Row	$4.95	7/19
Caird, Janet	PERTURBING SPIRIT	Doubleday	3.95	7/21
Cecil, Henry	A WOMAN NAMED ANNE	Harper & Row	4.95	7/19
Chase, James Hadley	THIS IS FOR REAL	Walker & Co.	3.95	7/24
Christie, Agatha	THE CROOKED HOUSE	Dodd, Mead	3.95	7/24
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CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	DUE DATE
Aarons, Edward S.	ASSIGNMENT— BLACK VIKING	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	6/29
Archer, Frank	THE TURQUOISE SPIKE	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	6/29
Eberhart, Mignon	THE HANGMAN'S WHIP	Popular Library	.60	7/6
Kemelman, Harry	SATURDAY THE RABBI WENT HUNGRY	Crest	.60	7/11
Pentecost, Hugh	THE EVIL THAT MEN DO	Gold Medal	.50	6/29

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

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A challenging and titillating puzzle . . . Maggie was positive that her husband Arthur was two-timing her. But how did she know? Arthur tried in every way he could think of to figure it out, and he took every conceivable precaution to keep his secret—but he couldn't fool Maggie: she knew.

(We couldn't figure it out either . . . Can you?)

NO MARGIN FOR ERROR

by BOB BRISTOW

ARTHUR DROVE QUITE CAREFULLY away from the lakeside cabin, keeping his eyes on the narrow, winding road, aware of the subtle fragrance of the pretty young woman buckled in the seat beside him. The lights of his car swept along the curving road, picking up the highway ahead. He braked to a stop and checked carefully for traffic before entering the highway.

The young woman chuckled and he turned his head slightly toward her.

"What amused you?" he asked.

"You," Gloria said.

"Oh?"

"Yes . . . you are a very cautious man, Arthur. About everything. You check everything twice. It's a side of you that constantly amazes me."

He heard her cross her legs, the nylon hosiery rustling softly as the firm thighs brushed, and he knew her skirt had inched above the knee teasingly; but he resisted an impulse to glance at her legs now because she was right—he checked everything twice, allowing no margin for error. Arthur was indeed an extremely cautious man—cautious to a fault.

"I should think," he said, "that you'd be grateful for my thoughtfulness. You'd hardly want a careless man in our situation. And a moment of carelessness, an automobile accident, even a minor injury, even running off the road while staring at your legs, might be a very costly thing—scandal, trouble at home that I can ill afford . . ."

Of course she understood, and even respected his caution. Arthur had not told her that in spite of all his efforts to be secretive, Maggie was suspicious. She had not only questioned him but had been harshly accusing—had even warned him. It was beginning to trouble him greatly. Why should Maggie be suspicious at all? He had made tremendous efforts to escape detection. Yet there it was: Maggie knew *something.* It was driving him to distraction.

The car reached a fork in the highway. There was seldom any traffic

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this late at night, but he slowed down, checking carefully before driving on. At last they left the highway and reached the isolated bus stop. Arthur braked the car. In the rear-view mirror he could see the multilighted bus approaching slowly from a few blocks away.

"When will I see you again?" Gloria asked, unsnapping the seat belt and sliding toward him. She offered her lips.

"Not now, darling—you have fresh lipstick on. It would be better not—"

The sensual lips puckered poutingly.

"I'll meet you here on Thursday night," he said. "We'll change the time to nine so as not to follow an exact schedule."

"I get so weary of this, Arthur," she said.

"I know but—"

"Won't we ever be able to—to be done with her?"

He breathed softly, checking the rear-view mirror to make sure she would have time to catch the bus. "You must be patient," he said.

At that she sighed and slid away, opening the door. He watched Gloria pass in front of his headlights, the orange skirt hugging her hips snugly, emphasizing her exciting figure, her pretty blonde hair tossing and bobbing at her shoulders as she walked. Beautiful hair, all right, he thought, but it had a tendency to fall out at times and he'd caught one of the blonde hairs on his shoulder just before going home one evening —all he'd need, to be trapped by something as stupid and careless as a long blonde hair.

The bus stopped and Arthur backed around, turned, and drove toward his home. Alone, he contemplated his problem. Maggie knew something. No matter how carefully he tried to keep his evenings with Gloria an impenetrable secret, somehow Maggie was aware that he was meeting someone.

Five nights a week he went out to sell encyclopedia sets. It was something he did quite well, and it supplemented the money Maggie drew out of her bank account to keep them comfortable. The truth was, he'd never been able to succeed in the competitive world. He'd lost many jobs because he couldn't get along with his bosses. The self-employment advantages of being an encyclopedia salesman in a world of knowledge-hungry people was not bad work—not really very profitable according to the living scale he enjoyed, but it did give him an opportunity to get out nights and see Gloria, who had become the most important thing in his life.

He drove home thoughtfully, reexamining his *modus operandi*. He went out three nights a week to make calls and to sell the encyclopedias. When he had a good night and sold more than one set, which happened once in a while, Arthur ratholed one of the sales, not posting it

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the night he'd closed the deal and not reporting it until later. On Tuesday and Thursday nights he met Gloria. To keep his wife from growing suspicious as to why he sold encyclopedias successfully only on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but never on Tuesday and Thursday, Arthur returned on those evenings with a sale he had saved from a previous night, thus making his sales record reasonably steady. He thought that had been rather clever of him . . . but Maggie was suspicious anyway. And that he simply could not understand.

At first Arthur thought Maggie had somehow concealed a microphone in the automobile and was taping his meetings with Gloria, spying on him electronically. He had checked carefully. He was very efficient about that too. He checked the car radio. Knowing he liked music while he was driving, Maggie might have hooked up a battery-operated tape recorder that came on when he turned on the radio. But he couldn't locate a tape device of any kind. He went over the car very carefully, checking under the seats, in case she'd hidden a small microphone there, under the floor mats, inside the dashboard and the glove compartment—everywhere; but he could not find any bugging device. Yet *somehow* she knew.

After the second warning from her Arthur was beginning to worry that she might be plotting some evil because Maggie was a very possessive woman—she had, in fact, warned him that spring day they were married that it would be a matter of "until death do us part" quite literally. That was long ago when she was trim and lovely, long before she had begun to stuff herself, before she had ballooned grotesquely—comically, as a matter of fact, if one didn't have to be married to her—all 285 pounds of her owning him, guarding him, jealously possessing him as long as he might live.

A few blocks from their attractive modern house, he drew the car to the curb, turned on the inside lights, and began to inspect the car minutely. He rolled down the windows to make certain there was no female fragrance lingering inside for Maggie to detect. He peered at the seat for possible stray hairs. He opened the ashtray to make certain no lipstick-marked cigarette butt would betray him. There was nothing—no clue whatever to Gloria's presence in the car.

As he went over the car a second time—just to be sure—he tried to puzzle it out. He considered the possibility that she was having him followed. Certainly she had the money to hire a private detective, but he had gradually become convinced she wasn't learning about him that way. He'd driven different routes at night, and had never been followed by a car. He'd arranged to meet Gloria at different bus stops. He'd taken Gloria to different parking places, and again he had never been fol-

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lowed. He'd even opened the trunk compartment impulsively one night to see if she'd done the obvious and put a man in there; but no, she hadn't.

Maggie had *some* kind of listening device in the car, he concluded, and as he cleaned up now, he searched for a wire, for anything that might reveal the hiding place of a miniature tape recorder. He found none. It was simply beyond his understanding.

Satisfied that the car was innocent, he closed the window and withdrew a cigar, a last careful gesture in the event that Maggie could possibly detect even the faintest lingering trace of perfume. Cigar smoke would take care of that. He checked his order book and noted that the correct date was recorded. Then he drove home.

His hands were trembling as he parked the car in the garage. He closed the doors and walked thoughtfully into the house. When he entered the bedroom, Maggie lowered a movie magazine she was reading, chewed pensively on the remains of a chocolate bar, and peered at him suspiciously.

"I sold a set tonight, Maggie—a nice little family over on Woodland Drive. Three kids in grade school now, so they'll have use for—"

"You're late tonight."

He drew a ragged breath and glanced at his watch casually. "It's just a little after ten thirty. I had a nice visit with them before I left. It took a while to close the sale—you know how these things are."

Her eyes narrowed, still peering at him suspiciously. She groaned as she propped her weight against the headboard of the bed, sucking at little bits of chocolate caught in her teeth, looking like some incredible monster in her hair curlers, her weight causing the bed to sag noticeably.

"Did you see that woman again?" she asked, her eyes boring into him.

He forced himself to meet her gaze, staring until he thought he would go blind if he did not look away. At last he shook his head and turned away. "That's ridiculous, Maggie. You've got to get this insane notion out of your head. It's warping your mind and it's making my life miserable. I'm doing the best I can—you know that. I've had some bad breaks, but now I'm making a little money—"

"Precious little," she said running the fat tongue across her teeth.

"—and I'm sick and tired of having to constantly deny your baseless suspicions."

"If you'd stop meeting the woman there wouldn't be any suspicions, Arthur." The voice came across the room, and a threat was clearly obvious in the tone.

He shrugged exaggeratedly. "I've done all I can do. I'm completely faithful to you, Maggie. You'll just have to believe me."

"Hah!" she said.

He began to unbutton his shirt

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collar. What he had most feared was happening. He watched her out of the corner of his eye as she rolled heavily to the side of the bed, slid around, and reached for her bathrobe. She pulled it over her bulging shoulders, glancing at him with an evil twist to her mouth. She pushed her feet into slippers and shuffled to the bedroom door.

"Where are you going?" he asked, his voice not entirely steady. She stared at him briefly and waddled through the doorway. Arthur slammed his fist against his palm and waited until he heard the kitchen door close and the screen door slam, indicating that, sure enough, she was going to the garage.

Quickly he ran through the house, reaching the kitchen window as the faint moonlight revealed her at the garage door. She went inside and the garage door squeaked closed, shutting off his vision. What in the name of heaven did she do out there?

She was invisible for a few minutes and then she reappeared, locking the garage and plodding across the walk toward the kitchen. Arthur left the window and hurried back to the bedroom where he ripped off his tie and shirt. He sped into the adjoining bathroom and began to brush his teeth furiously.

Maggie came into the bedroom, her face flushed. She lurched to the door of the bathroom and her hand came up, rather fearfully, with a large bread knife, the serrated edge gleaming in the light.

"You are going to have to find out something about me, Arthur. I am losing patience with you. I'm going to stick this blade in your liver if you don't stop seeing that woman."

He wilted. There was nothing to do but work desperately at another denial, a denial which neither of them believed and which was totally unconvincing because they both knew he was seeing another woman. Somehow Maggie knew what he was doing on Tuesday and Thursday nights.

"I'm telling you for the last time," he said, spitting toothpaste into the sink. "I'm meeting nobody! If you found a damned female hair or something like that, I just want to remind you that I visit the homes of married couples to sell those damned encyclopedias and it just might be that—"

"I didn't find a hair, Arthur. I don't need to find a hair."

"Then what in the name of heaven makes you think I'm meeting a woman? If you'll just tell me what makes you so sure—and I might add, rather pathetically mistaken—I'll be delighted to ease your mind by explaining—which I am absolutely certain I can do if only you'd—"

"Never you mind that, Arthur. I'm telling *you* for the last time—stop seeing that woman! If you go on seeing her, I'll stick this blade in your liver, so help me. I've given you the best years of my life. You've been a miserable failure at everything you ever tried to do, including

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being a husband—but you are *not* going to walk out on me! I won't have it."

He let the air go out of his lungs, defeated, a thing he knew she sensed. "I'm innocent," he said weakly, and it sounded almost like a confession of guilt.

Maggie turned the blade, examining it as the light glistened across the metal. "Tell her you won't see her again. And *do* it. I'll accept that. No questions about the past—you've made a lot of mistakes; about all you've done is make mistakes, Arthur. You've taken my money, which is why you married me, you've used me and haven't even respected me . . ." She was near tears. "And I haven't asked very much. I've tried to manage it so that you could have your self-respect. I haven't harped on how much of Father's money you've squandered on your fancy suits and your imported liquors and your pretty cars . . . But the one thing you owe me, Arthur, is yourself. It's more than a human being can bear to have been used, but then to be tossed aside—I can't stand that, Arthur!"

He turned away as she began to cry. It disgusted him. "It's all in your mind," he said turning toward the bed. As he climbed beneath the sheets he watched her hand drop wearily, the knife hanging limply. Then she put it on the bureau, her shoulders sagging, and came across the room.

"Arthur," she said.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, Arthur—but don't leave me. I tell you I just couldn't bear that."

He closed his eyes and listened to her heavy breathing beside him. It was a long while before he fell asleep . . .

The next day he followed his usual schedule, keeping his early appointments. But then he took time out to drive the car to a garage.

"It's something electrical, I think," he explained to a mechanic. "It doesn't seem to run smoothly."

He watched the mechanic lift the hood. Then while the car idled smoothly, Arthur asked questions about every wire he did not recognize. All the parts and pieces checked out. Maggie's electronic device was not apparent anywhere. And yet she knew!

For a time that afternoon he considered what Gloria had said the night before. Gloria had become vitally important to him; on the other hand, the comforts Maggie provided were too desirable to do without. If she didn't live very long because of her weight problem, all her money would be his. He didn't doubt that Maggie had genuinely threatened him the night before with the knife, but gradually as the day passed he decided that she would not really do anything violent.

He resented his position—the fact that he could not provide for Gloria in a grand manner on what

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he earned selling those damned encyclopedias; if he could he'd leave in a moment and—then suddenly it occurred to him that perhaps she'd hidden the listening device in his sample case. Before he returned home that Wednesday evening he went over the case very carefully. He found nothing but books, brochures, and duplicate order blanks.

That night when he returned home, he needed a drink to steady his nerves. The almost daily ordeal was exhausting. While he sipped the drink he heard Maggie go out. By the time he'd reached the kitchen she was returning from the garage. She came into the house and he noticed that she looked pleased.

"I hope you told her," she said softly. She raised a fat arm to her hips. "Things will be much better now, Arthur."

He sipped the drink slowly. She was sure that he had not met Gloria today, Wednesday—but she was just as sure he had yesterday, Tuesday. And she was dead right for both days.

He considered not meeting Gloria the next day for their regular Thursday night tryst. But as the day wore on he began to long for the feel of her in his arms again. Maggie would threaten, but certainly that was all. She'd sputter and carry on—but she wouldn't touch a hair on his head.

He determined to keep the rendezvous. Maggie paused at the door as he carried his sample case to the car. She called after him. "Remember, Arthur—please."

He understood perfectly. Making no reply, he went to the car. As he drove toward the meeting place he pondered the problem. What was different on nights he picked up Gloria and nights he didn't? Nothing except that one night Gloria was beside him and the other night she wasn't. Supposing Gloria was silent . . . If there *was* a device, it wouldn't hear anything. Certainly! That was it!

He brightened. There would be no difference tonight—there would be nothing to reveal that Gloria had been with him . . .

She was waiting when he arrived at the bus stop. His headlights focused on her, the yellow sweater revealing her adorable figure, the small waist emphasizing so attractively her rounded hips and long sensual legs. He became excited as he drew to a stop, got out, and approached her.

"Gloria, I want you to do something for me tonight. I don't want you to talk in the car until after we've reach the cabin—not a single word."

"Arthur, I'm growing very weary of this nonsense—"

"Please, Gloria—Maggie's suspicious. You don't know the hell I go through every night, and I'm convinced she has the car bugged. But if you keep quiet she won't know. Just don't say a word."

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Gloria shrugged, and pursed her pretty lips.

She followed him to the car. He helped her in, got in on the driver's side, and drove along whistling while Gloria sat silently next to him. One had to be careful— that was all there was to it. Exercise proper care, taking all possible precautions, and one *has* to be successful. There had been a slip-up all right, but now, with just a bit more care . . .

They reached the cabin and he led her away from the car. Once again he betrayed his wife, this time confident that he had escaped detection. Later he'd make some arrangement, something more lasting perhaps, something more comfortable and efficient, but for the time being he was safe.

Gloria agreed to remain silent on the drive back to the bus stop. He waved at her and after the bus left, he inspected the car carefully. Everything was in perfect order. Then he drove home.

He came in with considerably more confidence than he'd had on Tuesday evening.

"You seem happy tonight," she said from the bed. Her hair was again in curlers, emphasizing the fat face horribly. He nodded, thinking of Gloria.

"Yes—I sold a set of books."

He heard her sliding from the bed, preparing to check on him. "I guess you told her you wouldn't see her again. That's why you're happy. You don't feel guilty."

He ignored that. In a moment she went through the room. When he heard the kitchen door close, he did not even bother to go and watch her at the garage. He had it figured now, and he had checkmated her.

He was whistling softly when she came back into the house. He smiled to himself as he waited for her to return to the bedroom. She did not appear immediately. He had begun to grow concerned when finally she entered the room, her face a frightening mask of evil. In her hand she clutched the bread knife. Her eyes bugged insanely.

He took a step back into the bathroom. She pressed her bulk into the doorway and faced him fiercely.

"Maggie, Maggie, are you losing your mind? Are you—"

"You saw her again," she said, her lips trembling like a child's. "I warned you—but you saw her again!"

He had begun to perspire. His heart was throbbing painfully in his chest. As he moved backward, his legs touched the tub, stopping him. "You're making a dreadful mistake, Maggie. I didn't see her—I didn't see anyone. I mean, there *is* no one."

Maggie approached. "I gave you my life, my money, my everything, and all I asked—"

"Maggie, you can't do something crazy like this. What makes you think I have been meeting someone? I assure you—"

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Then she told him. The simplicity of it stunned him. He knew he admitted his guilt in the surprise that showed on his face. It was so simple —and after all the care he'd taken! No super-sophisticated listening device at all!

"The seat belt, Arthur. I always let it out to fit myself before you leave and when you come back it's much smaller. That woman adjusts it to fit *her*—and it happens every Tuesday and Thursday."

He felt his jaw drop, remembering how his safety consciousness had prompted him to insist that she always buckle the seat belt, how Gloria had done so laughing at his obsession about safety.

"There must be some mistake," he said feebly.

Now her face had grown dark and menacing. She held the knife in both hands, blocking his escape with her own body. When she came near, he made a frantic effort to rush past her, but she had been expecting that and dropped the knife level with his waist as he surged forward. He let out a little cry and collapsed against her, sliding down slowly, feeling the serrated edge tearing him mercilessly.

She stood over him for several minutes, as he lay there growing weak. At last she knelt beside him, wiping the knife handle carefully. His breath had grown very shallow.

"Here, Arthur," she said. She took his hand and pressed his fingers on the knife handle. He lay staring at his own hand holding the weapon, as the darkness swiftly began to make great shadows in the corners of his mind . . .

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Winner of a SECOND PRIZE *in* CWA *contest*

H. R. F. KEATING

We are happy to welcome H. R. F. Keating to EQMM. His first appearance is a story that will grip you in a strange and unexpected way (unexpected for Mr. Keating), and is not likely to let go even after you've finished reading it. "The Justice Boy" won one of the five Second Prizes in the EQMM-CWA (Crime Writers Association) short-story contest . . .

Mr. Keating was born in the English seaside resort of St. Leonards-on-sea, Sussex, in 1926. He was educated at a "prep" school (the scene of his prize-winning story), later at a private school, and still later at Trinity College, Dublin, where he was a Scholar of the House and twice won the Vice-Chancellor's Prize in English. After the university he went into journalism, "having an urge to write but having nothing then to say." He worked on various newspapers, including being a sub-editor for "The Times" where, he fondly believes, he sat in the chair once occupied by Graham Greene.

While still a journalist, he was urged by his wife to begin writing mystery novels, and when his first book was successful, he left "The Times" to devote more time to fiction. In 1964 his THE PERFECT MURDER *won the Crime Writers Association award for the best crime novel published that year. The novel introduced Inspector Ghote, pronounced Go-tay (not to be confused with George Bernard Shaw's ghoti, pronounced "fish"). Inspector Ghote of the Bombay C.I.D. is "a genuine addition," Anthony Boucher wrote in a laudatory review, "to the ranks of fictional detectives."*

"The Justice Boy" is, surprisingly, Mr. Keating's first detective-crime short story. It concerns a group of top formers in an English "prep" school (Seacombe Court Preparatory School for Boys)—13-year-olds who undertake to solve an unusual murder mystery, led by a teen-age detective named Watson (no, there is no boy-colleague named Holmes). In its authentic detail the story is rich and revealing, and at once fascinating and frightening; it will remind you of the English boy-school stories by Rudyard Kipling and Eden Phillpotts, and

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perhaps, if only by sheer contrast, of stories you've read about American boys' boarding-schools.

Boys, of course, can be lively and adventurous; they can be generous and kind—on occasion; they can also be cruel, spiteful, tormenting and torturing young savages; and for our purposes they can also be shrewd and resourceful—for some of the boys of today are surely the detectives of tomorrow . . .

THE JUSTICE BOY

by H. R. F. KEATING

SHIVERING UNCONTROLLABLY, THE boy in the blue-striped pajamas forced back his tears. He put his head round the corner and peered frightenedly into the Long Corridor. No one was in sight. The wide stretch of bumpy, polished brown linoleum shone bleakly under the unshaded lamps between its high walls, glossy dark green at the foot and buff-distempered above.

The air on this November evening at Seacombe Court Preparatory School for Boys was damp and chill. The cold seeped in with the wind that blew relentlessly off the dark waters of the Straits of Dover, past the empty boarding houses, over the muddy, waterlogged stretch of the school playing field and in through every chink in the red-brick, creeper-covered walls of the building.

At the sight of the empty corridor the boy gave a little moan, half of relief, half of misery. He wiped his eyes with the back of a rather pudgy hand. A new smear was left running across his right cheek. Both his ears stood out from his head and were even redder now than usual. But they always invited the sudden, sharp, tormentingly painful tweak. And the boy knew it.

Then, as if nothing that lay ahead could be worse than what was with him now, he darted abruptly forward and set out along the corridor. Slipping and scurrying in his bare feet, he shot past the brightly colored print of *H.M.S. Victory* at the Battle of Trafalgar —"England Expects Every Man To Do His Duty"—on past the place where three terms before a paper pellet soaked in ink had missed its target and had left its mark on the buff distemper, past the tall, brown-painted, locked doors of the Stationery Cupboard to reach at last the corner at the far end.

Here he stood still again and choked back a last sob. Then cau-

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tiously he peered round. The stairs ahead were clear. Only one more sharp dash was needed now.

And suddenly a renewed storm of weeping swept over him, breaking down the frail barrier of purposefulness that had driven him this far. He stayed where he was at the foot of the stairs—their treads covered with the same brown linoleum and with a gray rubber protector on each edge—and let the tears roll down his large, oval-shaped, unformed face.

But at last he recovered. He peered up the stairs short-sightedly and clutching the wide, rounded rail of the stout white banisters as if he needed to pull himself up by main force, he began to climb. Up the first broad flight to the landing where the School Bell hung. Then, with one imploring look at the closed green baize door beside the waiting bell, on up the second broad flight. And all the while shivering and shivering in the dank chill . . .

On the other side of the green baize door Alwyn Emanuel Prys-Jones, M.A. sat in his living room in a wing-backed armchair. His feet, which were small for a man of his size, were in slippers. The soles of the slippers were presented to a neat coal fire which sputtered cheerfully every now and again as a dart of white flame popped from the solid red glow at its heart.

Opposite Mr. Prys-Jones sat Mrs. Prys-Jones. She was not idle. Her fingers—only a little affected by the onset of arthritis—were busy mending a sock belonging to Bainbridge, Head Boy of the school. For Mrs. Prys-Jones concerned herself with every aspect of the running of the establishment. It said so in the prospectus sent to every inquiring parent, adding that the school took boys from eight to thirteen and the fees were eighty-five guineas a term, laundry and music extra.

Mrs. Prys-Jones sent a last thread of gray wool snaking methodically in and out of the warp of her darning and then laid down her burden. Mr. Prys-Jones reached out one large pink hand and took between two thick fingers and a thumb a fine-stemmed glass engraved with a pattern of wheat ears. It contained a full measure of a dry and remarkably delicate sherry. Mr. Prys-Jones conveyed the glass to his lips and sipped . . .

Out in the real world where people get hurt and suffer and see no way out of intolerable situations, the boy in the blue-striped pajamas, sobbing and shivering as hard as ever, had reached the top of the stairs. Ahead of him now stretched the Top Corridor, as long and as cold, as green-painted and buff-distempered as the corridor beneath it. On each side there were big white-painted doors, each with a number on it in black. On the left were numbers one, three, and

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five. On the right were numbers two and four with an unnumbered door at present just a little ajar.

The boy crept up to it and listened. The only sound was the steady dripping of a tap. He risked one hurried glance in at the row of eight washbasins, each with its liquid soap dispenser, and the four bath cubicles divided from each other by white-tiled partitions reaching not quite up to the ceiling. Then he scuttled on.

The heavy white porcelain knob of the door marked 5 slipped under his chilled fingers. And then mercifully it turned and the big heavy door swung open.

"Who's that?" whispered a voice in the darkness.

"Who do you think it is, you idiot, McWilliam?" another voice whispered. "It's only Prout Major back from feeding that mingy robin of his."

"Oh, shut up, Forshaw. Think you're so clever," McWilliam whispered back angrily.

But suddenly Prout Major, back in the dark haven he had been making for, broke into a flood of noisy and unchecked tears again.

"Hey, he's blubbing," said Trilling, sitting up in bed.

He felt under his pillow and a moment later a beam of light from his torch picked out the figure of Prout Major standing just inside the door, his face in his hands, his two red ears burning like signal lights in the torch beam, and his whole body heaving with the violence of his sobs.

"Stop that row, Prout," Forshaw said.

"And get into bed," McWilliam added. "Some of us want to get some sleep."

From the bed in the farthest corner, where it was the privilege of the Head Boy to rest from his labors and responsibilities, Bainbridge joined in.

"Prout," he said with precarious dignity, "get into bed and shut up or I'll have to report you to Mr. Prys-Jones."

At this Prout Major did begin to shuffle toward his empty bed. But he could not stop the tears.

"Listen, Prout," Forshaw said, "if you don't shut up I'll lam you."

And then from the other side of the long room with its two rows of black metal beds Hennessy picked up the chorus, sitting suddenly bolt upright, his dark eyebrows below the stiff, dark hair almost locked together in a line of rigid disapproval.

"Forshaw's right," he said. "If you go on making that racket, Prout, you'll get a double lamming."

Prout Major had reached his bed by now. He sat down on the edge, one bare foot on his little brown mat and one on the patterned linoleum. He continued to cry.

Forshaw slipped out of bed.

"I've got a better way to shut him up than a lamming," he said.

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He pulled at the towel hanging in the regulation fashion on the bottom rail of his bed. Holding it by one corner, he sent it flicking sharply outward till at its full extent it gave a crack like a pistol shot.

"Now," he said to the sobbing Prout, "are you going to shut up or am I going to make you jump?"

He advanced a step and cracked the towel once again. But Prout was incapable of stopping now. The sobs jerked him to and fro as if he was on puppet strings. Trilling, crouching on top of his blankets, his pointed face with its rash of freckles alive with glee, held him fixed in the torch beam.

Forshaw came forward, the towel flicking out at every step.

"Listen, you fellows," Bainbridge said from his corner, "it's after lights-out."

"Are you going to stop, Prout?" said Forshaw.

Another gush of tears.

The towel flicked once again and this time there was a sharp yelp of pain from Prout. Most of the others were out of bed now, crowding round in a half circle. Trilling held the flashlight steadily on the victim.

"What are you blubbing for anyway?" McWilliam asked, standing out from the group of onlookers by virtue of wearing pajamas with differently colored top and bottom.

"Yes," said Trilling, "come on, Prouty, what is it? We all want to know."

Trilling wanted to know everything. It was his weakness. He went about like a little vacuum cleaner, sucking up anything that came his way.

Without giving Prout time to answer, Forshaw flicked the towel expertly once again. Its end landed with an even louder crack on Prout's chubby thigh just where the blue-striped pajamas were stretched their tautest. Prout gave a long whimpering yelp.

Bainbridge, still in bed, interrupted agitatedly.

"If you fellows go on making all this row, Mr. Prys-Jones is bound to come in. And what will he say to me then?"

"Come on, Prout, tell us what you're blubbing for?" little Trilling said, entirely ignoring Bainbridge. "Come on, or I'll let Forshaw give you another."

"I'd like to see you stop me," Forshaw said menacingly, an excited glint in his eyes.

Prout, still racked with heavy sobs, did attempt to say something. But he was altogether too distressed to be coherent.

"Stop that filthy noise and let's hear what you're saying," Hennessy broke in.

"It's my robin," Prout Major managed to gasp out at last. "He's dead. He's dead."

"That's nothing to blub about, a stinking bird," Forshaw said.

"It's been killed," Prout Major wailed. "Somebody's smashed it up."

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The tears spurted out even faster.

"Stop it," said Forshaw. "Or—"

He began flicking the towel all round Prout's chubby legs, seeing how near he could get without actually hitting him. But no threats could quieten the sobbing now.

"All right," Forshaw said, standing back a little, "I'm really going to let you have it now."

"Wait."

Until this moment Watson had been sleepily content to prop himself up in bed on one elbow and watch what was going on. But now he flung back the blankets and came over.

"Stop it, Forshaw," he said. "If someone really has smashed up Prout's robin then he's got a right to kick up a fuss."

He stepped through the surrounding group, a stocky boy with untidy tow-colored hair, and looked down at Prout.

"Listen," he said, "was that the truth? Or were you making it all up? We can easily go down to the boot-hole and find out, you know."

Prout Major looked up at him. His face was totally tear-blotched and his sticking-out ears were redder than ever.

"It's the truth, Watson," he said. "It really is. My robin was all right when I fed it just after Dorm Four bedtime. And then when I went down to give it a bit of bacon rind I'd hidden under my bed this morning I found it was dead—all smashed to pieces."

He lifted up his head like a dog to the moon and bayed in utter misery.

Abruptly the door behind them opened.

Outlined in the oblong of golden light from the corridor stood the portly, tweed-suited, sandy-haired Mr. Prys-Jones.

"What on earth is going on here?" he thundered.

There was a rapid scrambling of bare feet on polished linoleum and everybody was in bed, lying warily, blankets up to the nose.

"Please, sir," said Bainbridge, "I tried to stop them, sir."

Except for this there was silence.

"I asked what was going on," Mr. Prys-Jones thundered again.

Still silence.

"One of you boys was making the most appalling noise," Mr. Prys-Jones said. "It even disturbed me downstairs. I want to know who that boy was."

Everybody in the dormitory might have been asleep it was so still. Mr. Prys-Jones heaved a reverberant sigh.

"How often have I spoken to you boys about the importance of owning up in a straightforward manly way?" Mr. Prys-Jones asked sadly.

He got no answer.

"If I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times," he went on with great weariness. "I had occasion to mention it to the whole school not a week ago. There was that disgraceful incident of the

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broken window in the pavilion. Someone must have kicked a football at it, but no one owned up. I do not know to this day who did that."

"And, sir," said Hennessy, lying flat still, "there was the person who broke my airplane, too, sir. You promised to ask who'd done that, but you never did."

"Be quiet, Hennessy," Mr. Prys-Jones snapped out, with a sudden change from sorrow to anger. "We are not talking about who happened to break what. We are talking about the fiendish din I heard emanating from this dormitory."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you make it, Hennessy?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Prys-Jones sighed and looked gloomily round. From under the blankets of Prout Major's bed there came a half-suppressed moan. Mr. Prys-Jones investigated.

"What's that? Who was making that peculiar sound?"

There was a moment's silence. It was broken by Watson.

"Please, sir," he said, "it's Prout Major, sir. Someone's gone and smashed up his robin. But nobody knows who, sir."

Three enormous strides took Mr. Prys-Jones over to Prout Major's bed. He bent his large pink-complexioned face toward the heap under the blankets to confirm that this indeed was the source of the trouble. Once sure of his facts, he jerked back the top sheet.

"Prout," he said, with a note of growing triumph, "was it you who was responsible for that appalling din just now?"

"Yes, sir," Prout wailed.

"I thought so," said Mr. Prys-Jones. "Then you can take two minus marks straight away, and there'll be another two for you if I catch you making one single sound more tonight. Understood?"

He flung back the sheet and marched over to the open door. At it he turned and addressed the now totally silent dormitory.

"There is one night in the week," he said, "when there happens to be a program on that appalling television which has some slight merit to it. Some of you may know what I am referring to. *World of Ballet.* Hennessy, you at least should be aware of it. Your own father frequently conducts the music for it, with all his customary passion and power. And all of you should know that I try, I *try,* to watch that one program. It isn't much to ask, once in a whole week. But what happens? I am interrupted by appalling misbehavior from the top dormitory. From the *top* dormitory."

He waited to let the full impact of his words sink in. And then, since he was in full spate, he went on.

"I do not approve of the television, as you well know. The standard of programs in general is simply abysmal. Abysmal! We have to have a Television Room because

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the parents seem to expect it. But that does not mean I condone. Except *World of Ballet*. And that is the very thing you boys have to go and ruin."

He turned on his heel, speechless with chagrin, and drew the door to sharply behind him.

In the darkness little Trilling ventured a comment.

"Honestly," he said, "Old Prissy-toes is a bit too much. Everybody knows that program of his was over three-quarters of an hour ago."

"Sssh," said Bainbridge, in purest agony.

And soon enough they were all asleep, even Prout Major, washed out by grief. Only Watson lay awake a little longer than the others, working through the possibilities in the darkness.

In the hurly-burly of the next morning—waking bell 7:15 a.m., getting-up bell 7:30, early gym 7:55, breakfast 8:15, bed-making 8:45—there was not a moment for anyone to mention what had happened. Even Prout Major, hurrying from washbasin to drill square, from breakfast to frenzied smoothing down of the uniform green cotton counterpane, had not an instant to think about his loss.

So it was not until a few minutes before the first period was due to begin for the top form—Saturday, 9:15-10:00, Divinity, Mr. Prys-Jones—that Watson put his first question.

Bainbridge and a few others were sitting and waiting, their books open. Most of the rest, like McWilliam who was busy opening a letter with a colorful Swiss stamp, were perched less conventionally on the lids of their desks ready to jump down at the last moment. Prout Major and Trilling were on the floor with their backs to the sole radiator which, with occasional internal gurglings, did little toward taking the edge off the cold air.

Watson stood in front of Prout.

"What time exactly did you feed your robin last night?" he said.

Prout, who had been despondently regarding his two bare knees, flushed sharply.

"Don't start blubbing now," Watson said. "I asked you something, and I want an answer."

Trilling, who had been deep in a science-fiction book, looked up.

"I say, Watsy, are you going to investigate The Case of the Murdered Robin?" he asked. "Because if so, actually you should let me. I mean, you're Watson, so I could be Sherlock Holmes."

"Come on, Prout," Watson said, taking no notice of Trilling, "just when did you feed it?"

Prout blinked. By day he wore a pair of spectacles with large lenses and a pinky-orange frame. They gave him a slightly owlish look.

"I already said," he answered. "I fed him just after the Dorm Four kids had gone up. If I go along to the boot-hole any earlier, one of them always gets in the way."

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"You ought to let them help," Bainbridge said. "Everybody ought to take turns."

"I don't see why I should," Prout replied with unusual heat. "It's my robin. I found him when his leg was broken and I mended it with a matchstick splint and I—"

"You didn't mend it," Hennessy broke in scornfully. "You had to go and ask Mr. Jespe."

Prout Major pushed himself to his feet against the tepid radiator.

"I only had to go to him because he had some proper twine in the carpenter's shop," he said. "If it hadn't been for that, I'd have done everything myself."

Hennessy bounced down from his desk. "Are you cheeking me, Prout?" He doubled up his fists expectantly.

"No. No, Hennessy, honestly!" Prout was obviously terrified.

Watson pushed between them. "Never mind all that," he said. "The point is: when you went and fed the bird at 6:15 it was all right, and you didn't see it again till you found it smashed up just after our lights-out. Is that right?"

It looked as if Prout Major was going to burst into tears again. But Watson went straight on.

"So the bird must have been killed between 6:15 and 7:30. Right?"

Trilling, who had tugged a notebook out of his bulging jacket pocket, turned to an empty page and began to write furiously.

"Yes, Watson," Prout said miserably.

"Well, nobody's going to break in here from outside at that time of the evening just to go to the boot-hole and kill a bird," Watson said.

There was general agreement.

"And last night was Friday," Watson went on. "And on Fridays Old Prissytoes lets all the other masters have an evening off."

"Quite right," Trilling said, scribbling hard. "They go to the pub, but they can't afford to get drunk because they're not paid enough. I heard them say so."

"So it must have been one of the boys," Watson said.

Again there was a general murmur of agreement.

"Listen," said Forshaw, "this is good. When we find out who did it, I vote we give him a top-form beating. Take him along to the gym, bend him over the horse, and everyone in the top form allowed to give him six of the best. Bags I go first!"

"Bags I last," said Trilling quickly. "When he's nice and tender."

There was an outburst of shouting as places on the torture line were rapidly claimed.

When it had subsided Watson looked at them calmly.

"You realize that the bird wasn't killed till after Dorm Four had gone up to bed," he said. "And from the time they go up till our lights-out one of the prefects is on bell duty halfway up the stairs."

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"Hey, yes," said Bainbridge, losing some of his dignity with excitement, "I was on bell duty last night. No one got past me."

Trilling looked up from his notebook.

"That means it must be someone from this form," he said. "One of us."

"That's precisely what I meant," Watson said. "And it's even fewer than that, if we can work it out, because I for one stayed in this room the whole time from when Prep ended till we went to the dorm. And others could have done the same thing."

"I was on bell duty," said Bainbridge hastily.

"All right," said Trilling from the floor, "you've got an alibi. And so's Watsy. But, hey, I haven't. I left the room and tried to get some of that potash of permanganate mouthwash from Matron to do a scientific experiment with."

"Make a list of those without alibis," Bainbridge directed.

Trilling was about to write when he looked up. "But listen," he said, "I *have* got an alibi. Matron's my alibi."

"All right," Watson said, "leave yourself off then. But I'll tell you two others I saw go out. Hennessy and Forshaw."

"I was with Mr. Prys-Jones," Hennessy said. "I took him my busted plane to mend. Only he never did it. Kept me in his study for half an hour, jawing away about my father conducting. And then in the end, when I asked about my plane for the fiftieth time, he just said he was too busy now."

"Old Prissytoes couldn't mend a flea anyhow," Trilling commented. "He's as clumsy as a herd of elephants. Look at the time Mr. Jespe was ill and he tried to take over Carpentry."

"The point is," said Bainbridge pontifically, "that Hennessy's plane is still out of action. So Prout Major still holds the record."

"Honestly, Bainbridge, you're a nit," Trilling said. "Don't you know that craze has been over for days? It's Treasure Island maps now. Or at least it was. From here on it's Sherlock Holmes Investigates."

"Anyhow Prout Major's plane shouldn't count," McWilliam put in. "He only got it because his parents buy him anything he asks for. Hennessy made his, right from scratch."

"Nobody ever said anything about it having to be a do-it-yourself—" Prout Major began.

Watson cut him short. "We happen to be working out who smashed your robin."

The reminder silenced Prout, and Watson turned to Trilling. "Cross Hennessy off the list."

Trilling began to scrawl out Hennessy's name. But suddenly he stopped.

"Listen," he said, "alibis like that ought to be checked. Someone

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should check mine with Matron, and I'll check Hennessy's with Old Prissytoes."

"A fat lot of sense you'll get out of him," Watson said. "But what I want to know is: where were you, Forshaw?"

Forshaw looked from side to side.

"I went out to the Pavvy," he said. "I left my goalie's gloves there after football."

"Can you prove that?" Trilling asked sharply.

"Of course I can't. But I'm not the only one who went out. McWilliam did for another."

"I just went to the dub," McWilliam said.

Sitting up on his desk, his thin face looking as usual darkly sullen above the frayed collar of his regulation gray shirt, McWilliam glared hard at little Trilling.

"And I can't prove that either," he said. "How could I, up in the dub behind a closed door?"

Trilling wrote down his name.

"Anybody else go out?" Watson asked.

No one admitted it. And no one accused anybody else of lying.

"All right," Watson said, glancing at Trilling's list, "that means it's either Forshaw or McWilliam. We'll just have to try and find out which."

"No, you won't," Prout Major said loudly, as if determined not to be ignored. "It's obvious which of them did it. It was Forshaw."

Forshaw's face, with its large, ill-formed nose and heavy jaw, went suddenly red with rage. He charged toward Prout Major, outstretched fingers reaching for his throat.

Watson jumped between them.

Forshaw stopped. He glared at Watson as if he was ready to fight his way to Prout against any odds. Then he stepped back.

"All right, Prout," Watson said. "Go ahead. Explain."

"Well, look at him," Prout began, a little less sure of himself now. "He's always been as cruel as anything. Think of the way he bullies the juniors whenever he can get his hands on one."

"He bullies you too, Prouty," Trilling said. "Don't pretend it's only juniors."

Prout contrived to ignore this.

"And what about last week's Nature Ramble?" he said. "When Forshaw hid from Mr. Prys-Jones behind a bush and pulled the legs off a live frog?"

"Made you look pretty green round the gills," Forshaw said.

"And now you've killed my robin," Prout Major shouted. "You dirty swine!"

Unexpectedly Forshaw did not attempt to punish Prout for the insult. He simply turned away.

"It so happens I didn't kill your stupid bird," he said.

"You did! I know it must have been—"

Prout Major's voice gave out

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abruptly as the door opened and Mr. Prys-Jones came in with a smiling morning-face.

"Come, boys, to your places, to your places," he said cheerfully. "No time to waste today."

As they all moved slowly to their desks Forshaw murmured one further comment.

"I didn't do it," he said. "But I know who did. And it's someone Watson never thought of."

"Silence," thundered Mr. Prys-Jones.

He turned to the blackboard and vigorously cleaned it with a wooden-backed eraser.

Watson leaned back from his desk toward Forshaw's.

"I bet I'm right and you're wrong," he whispered. "There can't be anybody else without an alibi."

But at Break that morning young detective Watson was proved wrong. It happened when almost all the top form were crowded into the dub—the school lavatories, tiled and echoing, perpetually smelling of harsh disinfectant. It was Watson's first chance to tackle Forshaw.

"All right," he said, "you think I'm wrong about you and McWilliam being the only ones who could have killed the bird. Prove it."

Forshaw turned to him. Behind them the automatic flush of the urinals squirted loudly.

"Everybody except the top form was in bed at the time the bird was smashed," he said. "And according to you, Bainbridge being on bell duty means no one could have got to the boot-hole unseen. But what you've forgotten is that the beds upstairs aren't the only ones in the school."

After a moment Watson saw it.

"The Sanny," he said. "I forgot the Sanny. And it's only just along the corridor from the boot-hole."

"And who happens to be in the Sanny?" Forshaw asked contemptuously.

"Prout Minor," Watson said.

"If you must play detective," said Forshaw, "you ought to be good at it."

"What do you mean?" Watson said, flushing.

"Just that Prout Minor's in the Sanny because he's got a stinking cold. And he got that because Prout Major held the door to the playing field shut against him when it rained like that on Wednesday. He made him wait outside till he got soaked to the skin for cheeking him. So don't tell me Prout Minor didn't have good reason to smash his brother's stupid bird."

Watson took the setback well.

"All right," he said, "I daresay it was him. But we can't be sure till he's been questioned."

"Then go and question him," Forshaw grinned. "Only don't let Matron catch you in the Sanny. Remember she reported Fitzherbert for being there once, and he got six lashes."

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Watson looked at him steadily.

"I'm going there now," he said. "Who's going to come with me to make sure I'm not making it up?"

Bainbridge found it his duty to intervene.

"Listen, Watsy," he said, "this is the worst time of all to go. It's the same time Fitzherbert was caught. They'll be bound to want to know why I didn't stop you."

"Who's coming?" Watson said.

"I will," said Trilling. "But I'll tell you who else ought to come."

"Who?" Forshaw asked. "Not me. I'm not going to get six of the best for nothing."

"No," said Trilling, "it ought to be Prout Major. It's what's called a confrontation."

"Hey, no," Prout Major burst out. "Why should I? It's unfair. I won't go. Why should I risk getting the cane just over a little stinker like Prout Minor."

"You didn't mind risking being caught out of bed for your robin," Watson said. "Well, your brother probably killed your robin. And if we find out he did, he'll get it all right when he comes out of the Sanny."

Prout Major went.

The Sanatorium, dignified as such in the school prospectus, was simply an isolated room reached by a short corridor running alongside the boot-hole. Since this corridor led nowhere else, there was no excuse for anyone caught there on his way to the forbidden sanatorium. The setup constituted as nice a trap as the most remorseless hunter could wish.

At the corner near the boot-hole, Watson, Trilling, and Prout Major stood listening. Their rear was guarded by boys stationed at either end of the Long Corridor ready to whistle if anyone came along. But there was no way of telling whether Matron was already in the Sanny.

"I can't hear her talking or anything," Watson said at last. "We'll have to risk it. Come on."

Pushing Prout Major on ahead, he set out on tiptoe. In no time at all, it seemed, they had reached the Sanny door, white and shut. Watson stooped and peered through the keyhole.

"Can't see a thing," he whispered.

They looked at each other.

"Only one thing for it," Watson said.

He took hold of the doorknob and jerked it round.

The Sanny was empty, except for Prout Minor lying in the furthest of the four beds. Watson hauled the others in and quickly closed the door.

"Hey," said Prout Minor loudly, "no one's allowed in here."

Watson crossed over to the bed and thrust his face close to Prout Minor's.

"Keep quiet," he said, "or it'll be the worse for you."

Prout Minor backed away toward the top of the big white-coun-

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terpaned bed. He looked not unlike his brother, except that his nose was smaller and sharper and his ears stood out if possible even farther. His eyes were wide with fear.

"Now," Watson said, "we've come to find out one thing from you. Did you leave this room yesterday evening? At any time, for any reason at all?"

Prout Minor's face closed up in instant calculation.

"Answer," Watson demanded.

He reached forward and seized Prout Minor's hand as it lay on the top sheet. Holding it hard, he jerked back the middle finger sharply.

"All right, all right," Prout Minor squealed. "I was only thinking."

"Well, did you go out of here? Come on—quickly!"

"No. No, Watson, honest. I never left for a single moment. Cross my heart."

Watson looked at the others.

"That doesn't prove anything either way then," he said. "So we've got three without alibis—Prout Minor here, McWilliam, and Forshaw."

"Except for one thing," Trilling said.

He jumped up on the bed and spoke into Prout Minor's ear.

"How was it I happened to see you out there in the corridor then?" he said.

Prout Minor gave a quick gasp of fright.

"I—I'm sorry. Yes. Yes, I was there. I forgot."

Trilling looked over at Watson with a smile of satisfaction.

"You're a fool, Prout Minor," he said. "I was only bluffing, and now I've caught you. You went out and smashed up your brother's robin, didn't you? Come on, tell us before we really start hurting you."

"No, no. It wasn't that. I went to the dub. That was it. Honest!"

"Don't lie," Watson said. "We've had enough of your lies already. You're meant to use the pot when you're in the Sanny. Everybody knows that."

Prout Minor swallowed and looked from side to side as if some miraculous way of escape must open up.

"Please," he said, "it's really true. I know you have to use the pot here. But I hate doing it. So I just sneaked along to the dub for a moment. I swear that was all—I swear!"

Without another word Watson got to work on Prout's Minor's middle finger. His victim writhed under the bedclothes and tears came into his eyes. But there was too little time.

"It'll be the end of Break in a few seconds," Trilling said urgently. "If we don't get back to the form room, someone will come looking for us."

Watson let Prout Minor's hand go. He went over to the door and listened.

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"They're making such a row out in the Long Corridor we'd never hear if Matron was right outside," he said.

Prout Major gave his brother a look of pure malevolence, as if he would like to pay him well for getting him into this jam. Prout Minor glared back spitefully.

"I'm glad someone did smash your bird," he said. "Serves you right for making me catch my cold."

"Shut up," Watson whispered from the door.

"And I think I know who did it," Prout Minor went on.

They wheeled round.

"Who was it?" Watson said. "Quick, or I'll punch you in the face."

He ran back to the bed and held his clenched fist under Prout Minor's pointed little nose.

"I bet it was McWilliam then," Prout Minor shot out. "He's always been jealous of us two, just because our parents are rich and his father's only a village clergyman."

At that moment the bell pealed out.

"Come on!" Watson said.

He darted over and opened the door. The corridor in front of them was clear. They ran.

On the way to the dining room at the end of the morning classes Watson contrived to lag behind. Just ahead of him was McWilliam. For a little Watson contented himself with walking a yard or two behind. Then just before they got to the dining room he caught hold of his arm.

"Just a sec, McWilliam," he said. "There's something I want to know."

McWilliam turned his dark, narrow face toward him.

"What?"

"Just what were you really doing yesterday evening when you said you were going to the dub?"

For a moment McWilliam stared at him with a look of black fury. Then he answered. "All right, if you must know. I was doing something else. But I'm not going to tell you, or anyone else, what it was. Not so long as I live."

"It's McWilliam," Watson said.

They were changing for football that afternoon. The top formers in their corner of the Changing Room, with its rows of back-to-back lockers, stopped tugging at long colored stockings and turned as one to stare at McWilliam.

He stared back at them, his football clothes much more faded than anyone else's.

"I did not kill Prout's robin," he said.

"All right then," said Watson, "what was it you were doing when you left the form room yesterday?"

"I won't tell you or anyone."

Forshaw went over to him, licking his lips a little, and looking unpleasantly excited.

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"How are you going to like getting a top-form beating tonight, McWilliam?" he said.

McWilliam made no reply. It was plain that thoughts were churning in his narrow head behind the two dark brown, fiercely glowing eyes.

Bainbridge, who was ready to go out onto the field, hopped up and down anxiously.

"I say," he called out, "it's time to begin. There'll be an awful row if we don't go now."

"No, just a tick," Trilling said. "Wait everybody."

He looked up from a fantastically tangled knot in the laces of his left boot.

"McWilliam may be in the clear after all. I've just had a theory."

"You'll have more than a theory in a moment, young Trilling."

It was Mr. Jespe, all hearty bounce. In the excitement he had come up completely unnoticed.

"And you, Hennessy," he boomed cheerfully on. "You're independent enough when anybody wants to help with your model airplane. Let's see a bit of independence about getting yourself out of here double quick."

There was a flurry of silent activity as indoor clothes were jammed onto hooks and last knots tied in heavy little boots. Then everyone rushed out.

"Oh, Mr. Jespe, sir," wailed little Trilling, still sitting at his locker. "I can't get this beastly knot undone, sir."

Mr. Jespe, for all his good cheer, did not possess a steady temperament. The standard of football that afternoon disappointed him, and in simple consequence there was no boisterous harrying of his charges back into their indoor clothes afterward. When Mr. Jespe was disappointed in anything, whether it was the standard of play on the football field or young Hennessy's unwillingness to be helped with his model airplane, he plainly sulked.

And so there was plenty of opportunity for Watson to continue his detective investigation.

"All right, Trilling," he said, "what's this theory of yours?"

Trilling heaved off his right boot without undoing the laces.

"It's just a matter of scientific deduction," he said.

"Come on, Trilling," Hennessy said. "Cough up, or I'll give you a hack on the shins you won't forget in a hurry."

"All right, all right. It's just that there's someone we thought had an alibi who hasn't really got one at all."

"You helped to make the list," Watson said.

"Yes, I know. I took his word for it too."

"Whose word?"

"Bainbridge's. He kept on about his being on bell duty all the time. But there was nothing to stop *him* sneaking down as soon as he'd rung one bell, smashing the robin, then sneaking back again."

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"There you are," McWilliam said loudly. "You see. I'm not the only one."

"All right, Trilling," Watson broke in, "I've got to admit it shows there still may be loopholes. So I tell you what: we'll have a proper trial and sort it out that way. We'll have it in the gym, straight after tea. And if we find McWilliam guilty in the end, then he can have the top-form beating there and then on the spot."

There was a stir of excitement. The idea appealed to their savage instincts.

As soon as tea was over, taking advantage of there being no Prep on Saturdays, they all made their way to the gym and set about arranging it to their satisfaction. The dangling ropes were tied together in heavy swaths and fixed to the ribstalls out of the way. The padded-top box was dragged to one corner to make a dock. The long low benches with flapping leather-covered hooks at the ends were ranged neatly opposite as seats for the jury. A thick coconut mat was hauled to the middle of the closely boarded floor as a prosecutor's stand. The beams were lowered to a convenient height and turned on their sides to make an imposing, if precarious, judge's seat. And finally, with a certain air of ceremony, the horse, over which in happier times they vaulted one by one, was placed at the far end of the big room where it could be seen clearly by everybody—the place of execution.

At last they were ready.

"Bainbridge," Watson said, "go and sit in the judge's place."

"Hey," Trilling objected loudly. "He can't be the judge. He's one of the suspects."

"Is he?" said Watson. "Do you really think Bainbridge did it? Can any of you see him smashing up a bird? He's just too soft."

No one attempted to deny it. Bainbridge clambered up to the judge's seat in silence.

Watson went to the prosecutor's mat. McWilliam placed himself sulkily in the dock. The others, even down to Prout Minor who had been allowed up "after tea," went to the benches. There was a sudden silence. They looked at each other uneasily.

"Come on, Bainbridge," Trilling said at last. "At least you ought to start it off."

Bainbridge drew himself up on the high seat and colored a little.

"The court is open," he pronounced. "Watson will begin."

"I accuse McWilliam," Watson said promptly.

Trilling clapped.

"Shut up, Trilling," Bainbridge said. "This is serious."

For once he was listened to.

"It still looks to me," Watson went on, "that McWilliam must be the most likely culprit. There's only three people who haven't got ali-

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bis, if you don't count Bainbridge. There's Prout Minor, Forshaw, and McWilliam. Well, McWilliam's the only one who won't say what he was doing at the time the bird was killed. And he's jealous."

He looked steadily at the dark figure of McWilliam behind the padded leather top of the dock. McWilliam did not move a muscle.

"Everyone knows how poor his parents are," Watson resumed. "Look at those awful pajamas he wears with the top and bottom halves different. And then there's his overcoat that comes miles up above the knees. And look at the way he only gives sixpence to the war victims on Poppy Day when everybody else gives at least two shillings. He's just too poor, and Prout's stinking with money. That's why McWilliam tried to get even with him. That's his motive."

He kept his eyes fixed on the target of his accusation. But still McWilliam did not show the least sign of having heard. From the jury benches little Trilling stood up.

"That's all very well," he said, "but McWilliam might just as well smash something belonging to almost anybody. He's jealous of us all. Everyone knows that. It still looks to me as if Prout Minor's just as likely as him."

Prout Minor, crouching inconspiciously at the back of the jury benches and occasionally sniffing loudly, gave a longing glance at the two swing doors of the gym.

"No," said Watson, "you've forgotten McWilliam's birthday cake."

"You mean that rotten old thing made by his mother with only one layer of icing?" Hennessy said.

"Yes, that's exactly it," said Watson. "And only about a fortnight before it was Prout Major's birthday and he had a specially made cake with a complete rocket-launching base on it."

"And the rocket really fired," said Prout Major.

"Exactly," Watson said. "And everyone knows that the one thing in the world that really meant a lot to you was your robin. Saving it was the only decent thing you've ever done. So naturally that's what McWilliam chose to pay you out with. It's just the mean sort of thing you'd expect from him."

"It isn't! It isn't!"

McWilliam had broken.

He leaned forward and banged the leather top of the box with his clenched fists.

"All right," he shouted, "I was doing something secret when I left the form room. But it *wasn't* killing Prout's robin. I was hiding in the dub for a long time because I was doing something I didn't want anybody else to know about."

"That's not good enough," Watson said. "It doesn't prove a thing. What were you doing?"

"I was sticking a Swiss stamp on a letter I'd got from home," McWilliam said in a voice that could hardly be heard. "It came by the

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last post yesterday and I hid it and changed the stamp. Then I slipped it into the pile at breakfast today. I wanted it to look as though my parents had gone skiing like everybody else's."

Watson stood considering for a moment.

"All right," he said, "that clears you, McWilliam."

McWilliam did not move from the place of arraignment. For some time no one spoke, though the juniors whispered among themselves. Then McWilliam produced his contribution.

"I suppose I can say it now," he began. "But I've got proof that one of the others without an alibi is a liar. And that's Prout Minor. I was in the dub for hours at that time and no one else came in. You know at once if they do because the door squeaks. So if Prout Minor says he left the Sanny to go to the dub, he's lying!"

"Prout Minor," Bainbridge said from his high seat, "go and take McWilliam's place."

Prout Minor got up and looked round in panic. Slowly, as if he almost lacked the force to walk at all, he began to make his way round the jury benches and toward the dock. Forshaw, sitting in the front row, adroitly kicked him on the ankle.

And he was off. He swung round, put his head down, aimed for the double swing doors, and bolted. He crashed through the doors, leaving them wildly flapping, before anyone could stop him, and darted through the narrow passageway between the ranks of lockers in the Changing Room beyond. But at the far end there were no swing doors. Prout Minor seized the dull brass knob of the single door leading into the Long Corridor, with its half promise of safety, and twisted.

His sweaty little palms revolved on the smooth surface of the knob. Forshaw, first of the hunting pack, pushed a large hand down his collar at the back and twisted.

They lugged him back and shoved him behind the dock.

Bainbridge climbed up to his seat again and heaved himself round to face the body of the court.

"Prout Minor," he said, "have you anything to say before I pass sentence?"

It was at this point that the double swing doors opened again and Mr. Prys-Jones sailed in.

"There's been a terrible amount of noise," he said. "Just what are you boys up to?"

He looked from one to the other, his gaze finally resting on Bainbridge perched on the high beams. Bainbridge looked confused.

Suddenly from the jury benches Trilling bounced up.

"Please, sir, it's a debate, sir," he said. "A sort of debate. You told us about them the other day, sir. And how you used to do so well at the Union of Oxford, sir."

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Mr. Prys-Jones laughed tolerantly.

"The Oxford Union, Trilling, the Oxford Union," he corrected him. "Though actually Wadham College Debating Society was more my happy hunting ground up at Oxford."

He looked round with reminiscent pleasure.

"Well, carry on, carry on," he said. "Don't let me interrupt."

And a moment later the double doors swung closed behind him.

"All right, Prout Minor," Bainbridge said. "Now let's hear what you've got to say."

Behind the leather-topped box, quite certainly a dock again, Prout Minor's face went a harsh red from forehead to neck.

"Please, Bainbridge," he said, "it's true what McWilliam told everybody. I never did go to the dub."

"But you did leave the Sanny," Trilling broke in. "I proved that."

"I know," said Prout Minor, beginning to wail. "Matron sent me out. She caught me penciling on the sheets and she made me go up to her room and stand in the corner like a beastly kid."

Even in his present situation the humiliation he had felt the evening before made his voice rise with a sense of intolerable injury. It was totally plain that he was now telling the truth.

"Well," said Trilling, a little uncertainly, "I think Forshaw should go behind the box now."

"No."

It was the unexpected voice of Hennessy, sitting straight and self-contained on the front jury bench.

"No," he repeated, "it's all very well for Trilling and Watson to go putting person after person up like that. But there's someone who ought to be behind the box who's never even been mentioned tonight."

He spoke with quiet confidence. There was a stir among the juniors behind him.

"Well, who is it?" Bainbridge asked. "If you can solve the mystery, Hennessy, you ought to speak up."

"I will," said Hennessy. "It's one of the great detectives themselves. Trilling."

Trilling stiffened.

"Go to the box," Bainbridge said.

Slowly Trilling stood up and walked over.

"It's all very well," he muttered. "But everyone knows I had an alibi. I was with Matron. Watson checked on it."

For a moment it seemed that the quiet Hennessy's hold was loosening. But he stood up without fuss.

"Yes," he said, "Watson checked. And who are just about the best friends in the whole school right now? Watson and Trilling, the pair of detectives."

Watson, still on the prosecutor's mat, was goaded to action.

"You shut up, Hennessy," he said, moving menacingly.

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"It's the truth, isn't it?" Hennessy challenged him.

"I may happen to be friends with Trilling," Watson retorted, "but I said I was going to find out who killed Prout's bird, and however much of a friend Trilling is, if he did it I wouldn't do a thing to stop his getting the top-form beating. And you needn't try to make out I would. Whoever did it deserves everything they get."

"All right then," said Hennessy, "let someone else go and check up with Matron."

"That's all very well," Trilling objected, with a show of great reasonableness, "but if people keep going up to Matron and asking her about me, she's going to get ratty and refuse to answer."

"Just what you hope will save your bacon, Trilling," Hennessy said.

"I don't care if—"

But Watson interrupted.

"No, wait a minute, everyone," he said. "I've got it now. And I can prove it completely. It was just this that gave me the solution."

Nobody made the least sound.

"It was what Hennessy said about not being able to get an alibi out of Matron," Watson went on. "I suddenly remembered that someone else had an alibi like that. If it's no use going to Matron to check, it's even less use going to Old Prissytoes. And Old Prissytoes is *your* alibi, Hennessy."

"All right," Hennessy answered. "And I was with him all the time in his study trying to get my airplane mended."

"Don't give me that," Watson said. "You know quite well, Hennessy, you'd never have gone to Prissytoes for help in a million years. He's as clumsy as a bear. And you wouldn't even let Mr. Jespe help you make your plane in the first place. You're too proud. You're just like your father standing up in front of a whole orchestra making them do what *he* wants."

"And if I say I did go to Mr. Prys-Jones all the same?"

"Then you're a stinking liar," said Watson. "You didn't go near Prissytoes, because Prissytoes wasn't in his study as usual last night. He was in the Television Room watching *World of Ballet*. We've got you, Hennessy."

Hennessy stood his ground, chin jutting forward, eyes blazing.

"All right," he said, "I did smash Prout's robin. I did it because he deserved it. He was the one who smashed my airplane. He wanted to get the record back and he smashed my plane to do it. He deserved to have something of his smashed, and something better than his plane too."

"Oh, no, he didn't," Watson replied. "Even if he had smashed your plane, all he deserved was to have his own smashed. But he didn't smash your plane."

"Oh, didn't he? Well, who did? If you're so clever."

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"Old Prissytoes did in his typical clumsy way," Watson said. "It's obvious. Look at how he suddenly stopped when he was jawing in the dorm last night about owning up. He remembered he'd never owned up to you. Any fool could see that."

They came forward and caught hold of Hennessy. They dragged him up the length of the big gym to the waiting horse. Eagerly they held him down. And then they gave him the top-form beating.

Beyond the green baize door in Mr. Prys-Jones's living room the cheerful coal fire hissed and sputtered. From her industrious darning of yet another gray sock, the property of little Trilling, Mrs. Prys-Jones looked up.

"What was that the boys were saying this afternoon about Prout Major's robin being killed or something?" she asked.

Mrs. Prys-Jones took a close interest in all the affairs of the school.

Mr. Prys-Jones held his fine-stemmed sherry glass between himself and the fire and looked at the effect of the warm glow on the delicate color of the wine.

"Oh, the wretched bird just died," he said. "It was bound to, you know. I told the boy so at the time he rescued it. It was simply a matter of natural causes, mere natural causes."

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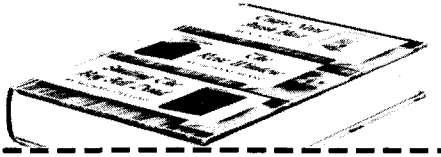

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